PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1997–98

COMPRISING PERIOD
2 June—12 June 1997

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2 June 1997

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FORTY-SIXTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 295**

SECOND VOLUME OF SESSION 1997–98

House of Commons

Monday 2 June 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Take-up

1. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to improve her Department's monitoring of the take-up of benefits. [875]

The Minister for Welfare Reform (Mr. Frank Field): The Government are anxious that those who are eligible for benefits claim those benefits. Necessarily, much of our attention will go to those who are retired, for it is among the retired that large amounts of unclaimed benefit exist. That, however, will not be an exclusive policy. Members may have noticed in the Sunday press two weeks ago that the Department advertised an increase in eligibility for industrial injury benefit for those underground miners who may be eligible for benefit due to their chronic bronchitis or emphysema.

Mr. Baker: I welcome the Minister to his new post. I welcome also his response in recognising that there is a need to increase the take-up of benefits. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, for many people, Government benefits forms present a real challenge, and that that acts as a discouragement for those who seek to take up benefit and are entitled to do so? Will the Minister undertake to review all Government forms to ensure that, in future, those who are eligible for benefit are not discouraged from receiving it?

Mr. Field: In the Government's total review of welfare, we shall ensure that we review the eligibility form.

Mr. Lilley: I welcome the Minister to his post and congratulate the Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, the right hon. Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), and her entire ministerial team, on taking responsibility for the largest and most sensitive Department in government, which has a splendid team of civil servants, as the right hon. Lady and her ministerial colleagues will discover. I wish them well.

The Prime Minister is even now recycling an Opposition speech elsewhere on the take-up of benefits by lone parents. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that Labour intends to pay new lone parents higher rates of benefit than those paid to married couples in equivalent circumstances from next April rather than equalising them as we, the previous Government, had proposed? Will he confirm also that this will cost the taxpayer ultimately an extra half a billion pounds a year?

Mr. Field: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind comments. I welcome him to his new position.

As the right hon. Gentleman, but perhaps not all of those who sit behind me, will know, the previous Government left about 20 cuts for the present Government to consider. When we have considered all the work that they did not do but built into their expenditure plan, we shall make an announcement to the House.

Occupational Pensions

2. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of those currently retiring are in receipt of occupational pensions. [876]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. John Denham): Around 70 per cent. of recently retired married couples and single pensioners are in receipt of an occupational pension.

For most people, a good occupational pension will ensure security in retirement. The Government want to see existing occupational pension schemes strengthened and, where possible, their coverage extended.

Mr. Spring: Does the Minister agree that nothing has been more liberating than the rise in incomes for retired people flowing from the personal savings and occupational pension schemes that have been available to them? What specific incentives does the Minister have in mind to encourage the growth of those opportunities so that people may feel more secure in old age?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that pension savings are important. It was a matter of concern that the membership by male full-time workers of occupational pension schemes fell considerably during the tenure of the previous Government. We wish to strengthen and encourage well-funded second-tier provision, and in due course we shall be consulting on our proposals for stakeholder pensions to bring the advantages of funded second pensions to those who do not presently have the opportunity to join an employer's occupational pension scheme.

Mr. Miller: I welcome my hon. Friend to his position. In the light of the concerns that I have expressed about H. H. Robertsons in my constituency, do the Government intend to review the safety provisions within occupational pensions?

Mr. Denham: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that he did in the previous Parliament in drawing the attention of the House to the problems faced by that particular employer and pension scheme. I understand that that scheme is currently being considered by the regulator, so my hon. Friend will understand if I do not comment in detail on it. We certainly will wish to take stock of the way in which the Pensions Act 1995 is being implemented in practice, and consider the evidence to see whether any further measures are required to ensure the security of pension schemes, in their members' interests.

Social Security (Waste)

3. **Mr. Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the level of waste in the social security system. [877]

Mr. Field: The Government will act resolutely against fraud.

Mr. King: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his well-deserved appointment as Minister for Welfare Reform—

Mr. Forth: It says here.

Mr. King: Thank you.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will not tolerate so many people struggling to make ends meet while so many others are taking advantage of the social security system? What will the Government do to tackle fraud and bring back public confidence and support for the social security system? No reading there.

Mr. Field: Also, no reading here. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's question—

Mr. Forth: You wrote it.

Mr. Field: As the right hon. Gentleman was a Minister with responsibility for schools, I had hoped for a better intervention than that.

I hope that, by the end of this Parliament, the House will see that we have achieved two clear objectives: first, to re-secure confidence in our social security system, by ensuring that those who are eligible claim; and, secondly, by preventing those who are claiming benefit wrongly from doing so. The House will therefore see a somewhat different strategy from that employed by the previous regime.

I compliment the previous Secretary of State on the preliminary work that he did in this area, but hope that very shortly he will see a redeployment of our staff so that we concentrate on areas where fraud is greatest. Only two London boroughs, to my knowledge—Haringey and Lambeth—have undertaken surveys on landlord fraud, and both are to be congratulated. Both boroughs looked at landlords who are drawing a considerable amount of benefit. Looking at the worst offenders, in both boroughs, some 65 per cent. of claims were fraudulent. We shall redeploy our resources so that the biggest gains are made for taxpayers, rather than unnecessarily roughing up individual claimants.

Mr. Garnier: Will the Prime Minister's plans, which were trailed over the weekend, save the social security system money, or will they cost it money, and by how much in either case?

Mr. Field: One crucial part of the speech that was trailed, rather inaccurately, over the weekend— [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Opposition Members have to wait only a short while and the speech will be published. It concerns our plans to give those who are 18 to 25 and unemployed, a chance to be employed. The moneys for that programme will be raised by the windfall tax in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget. In that sense, in the immediate future, the plans will cost money. In the long run, the Labour party believes that putting people back to work will save money.

Pensions

4. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for pensioners. [878]

6. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will review the 25p per week additional payment for the over-80s and the £10 Christmas bonus to take account of rising costs since these amounts were fixed. [880]

The Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women (Ms Harriet Harman): The Government will tackle poverty in retirement, and are determined that all pensioners shall share fairly in rising national prosperity.

Mr. Quinn: On behalf of my constituents in Scarborough and Whitby, I welcome my right hon. Friend to the Dispatch Box.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the work that needs to be done for pensioners throughout the country involves other Departments as well as hers? Should not all Departments pay due regard to the need for a national concessionary travel scheme for pensioners and the disabled? Certainly, one of the commitments that I made to the electorate in my constituency was that I would work in the House to bring about such a scheme and promote it.

Ms Harman: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House, where I know that he will be a champion of pensioners in Scarborough and Whitby. He has already made a number of proposals which my Department is considering, and I am happy to respond to his question about concessionary fares for pensioners on public transport.

Pensioners have retired from work, but they have not retired from life. It is important for all Departments to ensure that they have not only good incomes, but access to public transport. Many pensioners work for voluntary organisations and are an important part of the community, but they cannot perform such a role if they are isolated in their homes. Part of that isolation is due to inadequate incomes, and part is due to inability to travel—a subject that I am discussing with the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson).

Sir Teddy Taylor: Is the Secretary of State aware that there will be serious disappointment in the pensioner community if early action is not taken to deal with the two specific anomalies to which I referred in Question 6? She should bear in mind that, during the general election, the impression was created that new Labour would be more sympathetic to elderly people.

Does the Secretary of State realise that the cash that we spend every day, and send to Brussels every day to be spent on waste and extravagance, could make a significant difference to that absurd amount of 25p a week for the over-80s?

Ms Harman: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of the over-80s. He will know of our manifesto commitment to make it a priority to help the poorest pensioners, many of whom are women over 80, living alone, with no state earnings-related pensions, no occupational pensions, no savings, no nothing. They will be beneficiaries of our determination to secure income support for the poorest pensioners.

In the area covering the hon. Gentleman's constituency, some 9,000 pensioners are now dependent on income support and have to claim means-tested benefit. About 3,000 more are entitled to income support, but do not receive it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will work with us to ensure that the poorest pensioners in his constituency receive what they are entitled to.

Mr. Winnick: If there is a machine anywhere that keeps a record of our views and statements, I should be horrified if it did not record the fact that—like so many of my hon. Friends—I have campaigned for many years for an improvement in the lot of pensioners.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that pensioners are now asking for two things in particular, apart from any increase? First, they are asking to be given, during the winter months, the financial protection that they are undoubtedly denied at present. Many suffer misery and hardship during the coldest months. Secondly, will my right hon. Friend persuade her Cabinet colleague, the Secretary of State for National Heritage, to look again at the possibility of a concessionary television licence? The proposal for such a licence was defeated just over 10 years ago as a result of strenuous Tory opposition.

Ms Harman: I know that my hon. Friend has long been a champion of pensioners in the House, and will continue to be.

My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of cold weather payments. It is a scandal that, in Britain today, after a lifetime of working or caring for their families, pensioners should be among the poorest in the country, many having so little income that they must choose between heating and eating. Entitlement to cold weather payments is dependent on the claiming of income support, which means that the 1 million pensioners who do not claim income support receive no cold weather payments. They will benefit from our attempt to secure income support for the poorest pensioners. The Government have also pledged to cut value added tax on gas and electricity. That unfair tax is one of the factors that have deterred elderly people from ensuring that they have the heating that they need.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for National Heritage will consider my hon. Friend's question about concessionary television licences; I shall draw it to his attention.

Mr. Webb: On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, may I welcome the right hon. Lady and her ministerial team to the Dispatch Box. On welfare reform, does she agree with me that investment in affordable, quality child care is the only way to reduce the number of lone parents on income support, and that the spare change from the midweek lottery does not constitute such an investment?

Ms Harman: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He has a long and distinguished record of work on social security and welfare reform. I agree with him that lack of affordable, high-quality, accessible child care is one of the reasons why 1 million lone mothers have to bring up 2 million children on the breadline on income support. The National Council for One Parent Families—which I met—and the Daycare Trust will work with us to develop and implement a national child care strategy that will help lone mothers to do what they want to do: which is to get out and work instead of being dependent on benefits. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will also work with us to achieve that.

Mr. Bennett: I welcome my right hon. Friend to her post. Does she appreciate that, when the Christmas bonus was introduced, it was equal to one week's pension? Cold logic might suggest that it should now be abolished, given its £10 value and the administrative costs. Does she realise

that she would win the support of pensioners and would show the Labour Government's good intentions if she were to restore the bonus to its original value?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. We shall shortly announce a review of pensioners' incomes. For the first time, the voice of pensioners will be at the heart of government through the National Pensioners Convention. We shall hear their voice when we determine our policy. I thank my hon. Friend for raising the issue of the Christmas bonus, which I am sure will be considered in the review.

Mr. Heald: In joining the general welcome to the right hon. Lady, may I ask her whether the review will include the expenditure totals for her Department? Does she stand by Labour's plan to equalise the state pension age at 60, with a reduced pension of £40 a week—Labour's pension cut? Will she finally apologise for Labour's scaring lie tactics during the general election campaign? The Labour party tried to scare frail, elderly pensioners with lies about them losing their pensions.

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman knows that there is no question of a cut in the basic state pension. We have made it absolutely clear that we shall keep the basic state pension, and it will be uprated in line with prices. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is as concerned as we are about the 5,000 pensioners in his constituency who have no second-tier pension and must depend on income support, and about the 1,500 pensioners in his constituency who are entitled to income support but live below the breadline because they do not receive it.

We want to be sure that the next generation of pensioners—today's working people—do not become dependent on means-tested benefit, so we shall review the position of second pensions, and ensure that everyone retires on not only a basic state pension but a good second pension as well. Unfortunately, the previous Government failed to do that.

Young People (Benefits)

5. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the number of young people aged 18 to 25 who are dependent on social security benefits. [879]

Mr. Field: I welcome my hon. Friend's re-entry to the House. The answer to his question is 1.3 million.

Mr. Doran: I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind remarks. Is he aware that, even in oil-rich Aberdeen which has one of the lowest adult unemployment rates in the country, almost 1,500 young people under the age of 25 are unemployed? That is almost four times the adult rate. What steps will he take to ensure that those young people are offered real employment and training opportunities to remove them from benefit?

Mr. Field: I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents will not have missed the fact that, in his first question back in the House, he asks about unemployed under 25-year-olds, because in his constituency the unemployment rate among that group is higher than the average rate in Scotland or, indeed, in the United Kingdom. They and many of our constituents who are under the age of 25 will look forward to the Budget that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will shortly present to enable us to raise the revenue to introduce our welfare to work measures. They will offer a range of opportunities to every unemployed person aged between 18 and 25.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: While the Government do not plan to increase expenditure on pensioners, can the Minister confirm that the plans that have been announced today amount to extra spending on single parents and 18 to 25-year-olds?

Mr. Field: It would be helpful to the House for us to hear the speech and then table questions on it.

Welfare Reform

7. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to invite (a) voluntary bodies and (b) other interested parties to submit their views on welfare reform for consideration by her Department's review of the social security system. [881]

Ms Harman: We are committed to a review of the social security system. We want a modernised social security system which will tackle poverty and welfare dependency.

Mr. Bayley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a range of voluntary bodies such as the citizens advice bureaux and those for one-parent families have a detailed working knowledge of how the benefit system operates in practice and how in many cases it fails the people whom it is designed to help? Will she make sure that those bodies are consulted as part of her Department's proposed welfare review so that they can help to build a social security system that is not only sustainable but targets benefits on those who really need them?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is right. We need to draw on the ideas and experience of those who advise and speak up for people who use the benefits system. We want to build consensus for the modernisation of the social security system to ensure that it encourages rather than discourages work, savings and honesty. To do that, we need to draw on the experience of voluntary organisations such as the citizens advice bureaux. We also need to draw on the experience of Department of Social Security staff. I hope that they will be partners with us in modernising the system and fitting it for the 21st century. I have today written to all DSS staff members, stating that I look forward to working in partnership with them. I have placed a copy of that letter in the Library.

Mr. Andrew Rowe: I am sure that the right hon. Lady is as aware as I am that many voluntary bodies know that one of the most useful actions for a young unemployed person is to take on a job as a volunteer in one of those organisations. Such jobs prepare them better than almost anything for training and absorption into the workplace. Will the right hon. Lady undertake to look again at the extremely intractable problem of being available for work and how that interacts with taking on a responsible voluntary job?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. One of the four options that will be available under

our welfare to work scheme to people under the age of 25 who have been unemployed for more than six months will be work with a voluntary organisation. By offering that, we hope to ensure two outcomes. First, we shall help to build the all-important infrastructure of our voluntary organisations, which do so much in every community. Secondly, we want to give young people work experience so that they can understand the world of work, learn new skills, have something to put on their CVs and have a stepping stone to paid work.

Lone Parents

8. **Mrs. Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to enhance the provision for lone parents on income support. [882]

Ms Harman: We are concerned that there are 1 million lone mothers bringing up 2 million children on income support. I know that my hon. Friend has been concerned about lone mothers in her constituency who depend on benefit and that, like us, she believes that the best way in which to help them and their children have a better standard of living is to allow them the opportunity, which they want, to secure that better standard of living by going out to work.

Mrs. Jackson: I congratulate my right hon. Friend not only on her position, but on the way in which and speed with which she has put opportunities for women, particularly lone mothers, at the top of our political agenda. I am sure that she will agree that the vast number of mothers, both lone and otherwise, want to work, so long as they are not going to be out of pocket. What steps will she take to ensure that the extra child care that is required to enable those women to take up work and training opportunities is both flexible and affordable?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend raises the important issue of the relationship between balancing responsibilities for children at home with responsibilities at work. Our determination to formulate and implement a national child care strategy is at the heart of that. The week before last, I met the National Council for One Parent Families, which told me that the lack of affordable child care is one of the most important reasons preventing lone mothers from going to work. That is why the Prime Minister, in his speech today on welfare reform, has said that he is determined to do two things: first, to ensure that, when their youngest child turns five, lone mothers are invited into jobcentres to be given advice and information about voluntary work, training and work; and secondly to have a network of after-school clubs throughout the country to ensure that, when lone mothers are perhaps working beyond school hours, they know that their children are learning and playing safely in proper, supervised facilities, rather than feeling that they are having to wander the streets.

Mr. Lilley: I do not know, Madam Speaker, whether you can advise the House, but is there any precedent for the Prime Minister making a speech on social security during Social Security Questions, the content of which is apparently unknown to Social Security Ministers? I have just received a copy, but, obviously, the House has not had time to consider it.

Will the right hon. Lady now clarify the answer given by the Minister of State earlier? Are we to understand that she is now considering reneging on the pledge that she repeatedly gave the House and the electorate that she would pay higher benefits to lone parents than those available to married couples in equivalent circumstances, rather than equalising them, as we had promised beforehand?

Ms Harman: The pledge that we made repeatedly and that we repeated in our manifesto, and the way in which we asserted that our approach was different from that of the previous Government—whose approach was to criticise lone mothers and to say that they were all young girls who had got pregnant to jump the housing queues—was to say that the best form of welfare for people of working age is work. We know that lone mothers want to work. The right hon. Gentleman's Government simply said, "Here is your order book. We will check up once every three years to see whether you are still living at the same address and come back when your youngest child is 16." That was not good enough for lone mothers, for their children or for the taxpayer. We are going to ensure a better standard of living for lone mothers and their children and a better deal for the taxpayer.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Cambridgeshire child care information service, which was launched some months ago, has been a huge success in helping parents and lone parents back into work, giving integrated advice not only on jobs, training and benefits, but on child care? Will she try to ensure that that is a national system and not for the benefit just of people in Cambridgeshire?

Ms Harman: Yes. I have asked my officials to examine closely the pioneering work that my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) has done in the Cambridgeshire Childcare Links project, which brings all the information together in one place so that the lone mother seeking work can, possibly with a child pulling at her skirt trying to distract her attention, nevertheless have at her fingertips all the information that she might want about benefits, local training courses, local after-school clubs and part-time courses at local colleges. Using modern technology to improve and modernise the social security system to enable it to provide the services that people want is one of the most important parts of our welfare to work programme.

Mr. Lansley: Perhaps the right hon. Lady will now tell us whether she proposes to pay additional benefits to lone parents over and above the benefits that would be payable to married couples in the same circumstances. Will she pay those extra benefits? Will she give us a clear answer?

Ms Harman: I have set out, at some length, our approach to lone mothers. The hon. Gentleman will have to wait until we make an announcement—indeed, he would have had to wait for the previous Government to do so—because of the issue of uprating in advance of the Budget.

It is clear that we have a different approach. The issue of income for lone mothers is not just about benefits but about their ability to work. We are working closely with the organisations representing lone mothers to establish

a programme that will ensure that, like other European countries, Britain has more lone mothers in work. In the remainder of Europe, they are twice as likely to work and half as likely to be benefit dependent as they are in this country. In Britain, married and cohabiting women are twice as likely to be working as their counterparts who are lone mothers. We have to sort that out.

Income Support (Pensioners)

9. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the number of pensioners dependent on income support in retirement. [883]

Mr. Denham: In August 1996, a total of 1,768,000 pensioners were in receipt of income support. We are concerned that up to 1 million pensioners do not receive the income support to which they are entitled. We are commissioning research so that we can more fully understand why they do not claim or receive benefit.

Mr. Watts: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment. Does he agree that the poor take-up of income support by pensioners is not just a matter of personal choice, as the previous Government claimed, but that many pensioners feel that a stigma is attached to claiming means-tested benefits?

Mr. Denham: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House and thank him for his question. It is clear from what we already know that a range of barriers prevents pensioners from claiming income support, and the stigma associated with claiming benefit may be one. We should understand all the barriers facing pensioners who do not claim income support so that we can move forward.

Mr. Fallon: Is it not precisely that group of pensioners who are entitled to a clear answer on the question of the pensioners' Christmas bonus, to which the Secretary of State alluded a few moments ago? Will the Minister confirm that, under the review, that bonus could be scrapped?

Mr. Denham: Pensioners need to know clearly why, year after year, the Conservative Government showed such disinterest in the plight of the poorest pensioners. We raised the issue in opposition, but were told that pensioners went without income support because they chose to live in poverty. I doubt that that is true, which is why we need to understand the barriers to their claiming income support.

Invalidity Benefits

10. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals she has to reduce the pressures on beneficiaries to come off invalidity benefits. [884]

Mr. Denham: The recent Social Security Select Committee inquiry into incapacity benefit raised a number of issues about the benefit and the operation of the all work test. We will consider the evidence received by the Committee and judge whether the current operation of the test represents a fair assessment of an individual's incapacity for work for benefit purposes.

Mr. Mitchell: I welcome my hon. Friend to his new responsibilities. I hope that the whole team will be tough on fraud and prevent any attempt to swing the lead. I hope that that will be recorded for Excalibur.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the medical test of fitness for work to qualify for invalidity benefit has become far too crude and simplistic? It asks doctors to decide matters of employment policy and suitability for jobs rather than strictly medical matters.

Mr. Denham: It is important that we examine carefully the evidence on the operation of the all work test that was given to the Social Security Select Committee. If my hon. Friend is concerned about specific cases, I ask him to provide us with details. It is important that the test for incapacity benefit commands confidence as a fair system that appropriately assesses whether an individual is incapable of work for benefit purposes.

Mr. Llwyd: I agree with the Minister, but will he urgently examine the physical symptoms that must be demonstrated by people suffering from myalgic encephalomyelitis or various other non-physical complaints? They are placed at a gross disadvantage from the outset. The test must be re-examined—urgently, please.

Mr. Denham: I repeat my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). We will examine the evidence on the operation of the test, because we wish to ensure that it commands confidence.

Mr. Pike: I welcome the Minister's comments on the Government's commitment to re-examine the all work test, which is clearly unfair. Many appeals succeed, so will he assure us that the appeals system will not be changed pending that re-examination? The appeal system has been under threat, but we must ensure that appeals that may prove successful can be made.

Mr. Denham: We want to ensure that the appeal system is simple and straightforward and that it does not contain some of the complexities and delays that are currently encountered. I assure my hon. Friend that, as the appeal system develops, we will improve the way in which it operates.

Lone Parents (Benefits)

11. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to change the level of benefits paid to lone parents. [885]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Keith Bradley): The Government have given a commitment to remain within spending totals this year and next and, in the light of the 20 social security cuts made by the previous Administration, we are examining a range of options to do so. The Secretary of

State for Social Security has made it absolutely clear that the best way of tackling poverty among lone parents and children is to help parents back into work.

Mr. Lidington: Is it the Government's policy to implement the previous Government's plans to integrate payment of lone parent premium and lone parent benefit for new claimants with the comparable benefits available to married couples? If not, where does the Minister expect to find the money to fill the consequent gap in his Department's spending plans?

Mr. Bradley: The Secretary of State has already made it clear that, because of our inheritance from the previous Administration, we are examining a range of options. An announcement will be made in the Budget.

Mr. Rowlands: That was the second time in this Question Time that Ministers mentioned 20 cuts that they discovered, but which were not announced by previous Ministers. Will the Minister describe those 20 cuts, please?

Mr. Bradley: I welcome my hon. Friend back to the House. He makes a very important point, because those cuts cover all aspects of social security spending. We have inherited a complicated situation, which we are urgently reviewing. We will consider how to deal with it in the forthcoming Budget and in the subsequent uprating order.

Child Support Agency

12. **Mr. John Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she will undertake a review of the workings of the Child Support Agency. [886]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government believe that children are entitled to the financial support and, ideally, the emotional support of both parents, wherever the parents may live. In the coming months, we will carefully examine how to ensure that the Child Support Agency provides an efficient and effective service to assess and collect due maintenance.

Mr. Cryer: I am very grateful for that answer. Is it not clear, however, that the Child Support Agency is simply not working? It is not working because it was incompetently established by the previous Government so that they could subsidise their own spending.

Mr. Bradley: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House, and I thank him for his question. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have criticised the way in which the Child Support Agency was established, the way in which legislation on it was passed and the way in which the agency has subsequently been administered. I am pleased to say, however, that the CSA is working more efficiently. The number of assessments is now up to 580,000, and the percentage of those partially or fully compliant has risen to 64 per cent. I should stress to my hon. Friend and to all hon. Members who are critical of the CSA that, in the coming months, we will conduct a review of the agency, and that we will subsequently announce further proposals.

Mr. Forsythe: On behalf of my colleagues, I welcome the Minister and his colleagues to the Dispatch Box and wish them well.

Will the hon. Gentleman concede that the CSA has been responsible for causing more dissension between former partners than anything else? Will the Government please examine the whole system and take into account the recommendations of the previous Select Committee on Social Security? It proposed a single sum per child rather than the formula that is considered ridiculous by many people and that, I believe, cannot be understood by those who implement it, and certainly not by those who pay or receive payment?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments. I am aware of his excellent work as a member of the Select Committee and of the Committee's invaluable reports on this topic. I am also aware of the problems caused by the complexity of the formula, which I assure him will be considered in great detail in our review of the CSA.

Benefit Dependency

14. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to tackle benefit dependency. [890]

Ms Harman: Tackling benefit dependency is one of this Government's highest priorities. Lack of work is one of the greatest causes of poverty for families in Britain today, which is why tackling it is a priority.

Mr. Cunningham: I congratulate my right hon. Friend and other Ministers on their appointment. There is another dimension to child care—the role of employers and employers' associations. What are my right hon. Friend's plans, and those of other Departments, to take up with employers the very important issue of child care?

Ms Harman: We want a public-private partnership in implementing our national child care strategy because it is an important part of enabling lone mothers and, indeed, married women to work. Child care should be regarded as part of the national economic infrastructure and as important to women as the roads and railways on which they travel to work.

My hon. Friend is always concerned about the people of working age in his constituency who are out of work. He has drawn to my attention the fact that, in addition to his 3,000 constituents who are registered as unemployed, a further 27,000 people of working age in the Coventry area are not in work, and many of them are bringing up their children on benefits. Our national child care strategy is an important part of our welfare-to-work strategy for the one in five workless households.

Mr. Willetts: Will the Secretary of State put into perspective the Government's aim of taking 250,000 young people off benefit and getting them into work by confirming that last year 300,000 young people aged 18 to 24 came off benefit and went into work? Is the Government's target recognition of the fact that, under their policy for a minimum wage, they will do worse than the previous Government?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the time for complacency about young people who are not working is over. It is unacceptable that people who should

have their whole lives ahead of them have instead been thrown on the scrap heap. Hundreds of thousands of young people feel a bitter sense of disappointment that they have no future, but this Government will make them a priority. We shall invest in their future with quality training and worthwhile jobs, which our welfare-to-work programme will bring. It is one of the principal reasons why the British people voted in the new Labour Government and voted out the Conservatives.

Mr. McAllion: One of the proposals to reduce benefit dependency made at the fag end of the Tory Government was to restrict housing benefit for single claimants under 60 who rented in the private sector by denying them the right to exclusive use of a bathroom, a toilet or a kitchen. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that proposal was a disgrace, treating benefit claimants as second-class citizens? May we have an assurance that it will not figure in the proposals made by our Government?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend raises an important point. During 18 years of Conservative government—

Madam Speaker: Order. Would the right hon. Lady address the House? She is constantly turning round. I understand the temptation to do so, but she is addressing the House, not an individual Member.

Ms Harman: My apologies, Madam Speaker.

My hon. Friend makes an important point about housing benefit. During 18 years of Conservative government, instead of £11 billion a year being invested in housing it was invested in housing benefit, with the result that many people in high-rent areas have become trapped on housing benefit and unable to go out to work. In the absence of a proper housing policy, the previous Government responded to the increase in housing benefit simply by paring it back bit by bit. We are determined to work with the Department of the Environment and Transport in a cross-departmental initiative to ensure a sensible housing policy that enables people to have affordable housing without being trapped on benefits. We are considering the housing benefit cuts proposed by the previous Government.

Habitual Residence Test

15. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received on the operation of the habitual residence test. [891]

Mr. Keith Bradley: To date, I have received only one representation on the habitual residence test, from the charity Prisoners Abroad.

Mr. Rooney: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I am sure that he recognises that the test was introduced by one of the most vicious and vindictive Acts of the last Parliament. It had little to do with benefit tourism and more to do with people from the Indian subcontinent. Does he agree that, as a minimum, the Act should be amended so that the test does not apply to British citizens and people with the right of permanent abode in Great Britain?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments because I know that he has considered the issue in great detail over the years. His assiduousness on behalf of his constituents is well known. We shall undertake a wide-ranging review of the social security system and I assure my hon. Friend that the habitual residence test will be included.

Income Support

16. **Mr. Heppell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the proportion of children being brought up in families dependent on income support. [892]

Mr. Field: Almost 3 million children are growing up in households dependent on income support—a threefold increase since 1979.

Mr. Heppell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that as almost one child in four is brought up on income support, the best way to help those 3 million children is through a Government strategy that puts people back to work and off benefits?

Mr. Field: The answer to that question is yes. I hope that the House paid careful attention to the earlier answer of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about single parents. We do not share the view held in some quarters that endless bullying is required. Our experience from our constituencies is that many single parents wish to work but are prevented from doing so by inadequate child care provision. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mrs. Jackson) made that point earlier. I hope that hon. Members will discover over the coming months how the Government's strategy will evolve and how different we shall be from the previous Administration.

Mr. Evans: While it is not ideal for any families with young children—or for pensioners, for that matter—to be dependent on income support, the reality is that some are. Will the Minister assure the House that if the Chancellor of the Exchequer's windfall tax results in higher prices for gas, electricity and other utilities, families on income support will get the protection they deserve?

Mr. Field: I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman's question—he should know how the uprating is done. Those families will be protected.

Mr. Skinner: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is fairly easy to get a headline saying that the Government will drive people back into work and off welfare, but that the more difficult thing is to find the work? In my area, in coalfields throughout Britain and in many inner-city areas, there are literally thousands of people in each constituency who do not have a chance of finding work because there is not any work. In one third of my constituency, which has been devastated by pit closures, there are more than 50 per cent. unemployed. I request my hon. Friend and other Ministers to understand that, although the easy headline may be all right for a day or

two, the important thing is that this Government will be characterised by their success in finding work for those who badly need it.

Mr. Field: I welcome my hon. Friend's question because I, too, represent an area where many people are unemployed—as a result of the closure of the shipyard. My hon. Friend, like all hon. Members, will pay careful attention to what we say and put on the record. We stood for election and won on the basis that we would raise a windfall tax and use it to offer four options to all people between 18 and 25. Such options have never been offered to that group by any previous Government.

Clearly, the opportunities will be matched by sanctions. This Government are not, however, in the business of picking on claimants for the sake of roughing them up. We are not always responsible for the headlines that appear in our names and I hope that people have paid careful attention to the statements made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and ministerial colleagues this afternoon.

Allowance Claim Forms

17. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to simplify claim forms for disability living allowance and attendance allowance; and if she will make a statement. [893]

Mr. Field: My hon. Friend will know that a simplified claim form for children claiming DLA was introduced in April this year and that we hope to have a simplified form for DLA and for attendance allowance for adults by October this year.

Mr. Wareing: I welcome my hon. Friend to the Front Bench; his answer is reassuring. I hope that he will ensure that the simplified form is available by October this year because the existing form is more complicated than a tax return. It needs a Philadelphia lawyer to interpret many of the questions and many disabled people are put off from even applying. I believe that they will apply after October, provided that my hon. Friend is correct in his prediction.

Mr. Field: I also hope that I am correct in my prediction. My hon. Friend has a long record of promoting the causes of the disabled. He has two Acts to his credit and his remarks will be carefully taken into account by the Government.

Mrs. Ewing: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Front Bench, not least because of his analytical thinking on social security. I also welcome his response to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing). In recognition of the fact that next week is carers' week, will the Minister ensure that there is a direct commitment to introduce the simplified form by October this year because all of us who have worked in this sphere know exactly how difficult the forms have been?

Mr. Field: The commitment is for October this year, and I hope that hon. Members will keep the Government to that target.

Reduced Earnings Allowance

19. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will review the current regulations on the reduced earnings allowance; and if she will make a statement. [895]

Mr. Denham: We are reviewing the current position on the reduced earnings allowance. Those who lost out from the ending of the reduced earnings allowance after their retirement are among many who suffered injustice under the previous Government. The House will recognise the difficulty in restoring the position of everyone who suffered under that Government .

Mr. Rowlands: Is my hon. Friend aware that very many people who received reduced earnings allowances assumed that they would do so for life? The retrospective change was made recently by Tory Ministers. Is he also aware of the confusion that has arisen due to hundreds of appeals and different decisions being made on them? Will he therefore pay urgent attention to the situation to remove the worst hardships that many of our constituents are suffering?

Mr. Denham: I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend on this matter, which I know is of great importance in his constituency. I believe that it is true that a number of those who lost income of about £30 a week had previously been informed that they would receive benefit either for life or for a substantial period after their retirement. That is part of the injustice such people suffered. A number of appeals and Social Security Commissioner decisions are certainly in the pipeline. As I said, we are urgently reviewing the allowance.

Asylum Seekers

20. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will review the social security rules governing benefits to asylum seekers. [896]

Mr. Keith Bradley: As I have already made clear to the House, we intend to carry out a wide-ranging review of the social security system. As part of that review, we will consider the position of all claimants, including asylum seekers.

Mr. Cohen: Will my right hon. Friend—sorry, my hon. Friend, who is no doubt soon to become "right hon."—denounce the wicked Tories of the previous Administration for starving the families of lawful asylum seekers whose only crime was to wait for their appeal to be heard? Will he ensure a much more fair and humane system?

Mr. Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that rapid elevation.

I entirely agree that the problem has been the length of the process for determining applications. We must set in train a system that speeds it up. As part of our wide-ranging review, we will hold discussions with the Home Office, the Department of Health and other Departments to ensure that asylum seekers are treated fairly.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I apologise for not giving you full notice of my point of order, but may I refer you to motion No. 4 on the Order Paper concerning the business of the House? The motion is to dispose of proceedings on a motion. Although that is not unusual in the House, it is most unusual, if not unknown, that we should be asked to pass motion No. 4 before we know about the motion on which debate will be curtailed.

We are being asked to limit debate on modernisation of the House of Commons procedures, yet we have no knowledge of what the motion will contain. Once we pass motion No. 4, it will be possible for the Government to put anything in the modernisation motion, have only an hour and a half's debate on it and ride roughshod over the House. Surely you, Madam Speaker, must defend the rights of the Opposition to know what all this is about and try to assist the Government in getting such things right—even at the beginning of their period in office.

Madam Speaker: I am sure that such a distinguished person as the right hon. Member would not allow the Government to ride roughshod over the House.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should keep his seat until I have finished.

The right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) raises an interesting point, but it is very technical. He knows full well that one voice raised in objection to the motion tonight will mean that the whole thing will have to start all over again. He could therefore do just that if he is in the House at that time.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Have you received any request from Government Front Benchers to make a statement on benefits for lone parents? If you have not, will you arrange in future that all hon. Members automatically receive tickets to speeches made by the Prime Minister in which he makes major policy announcements?

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman have a similarly comic point of order for me?

Mr. Jenkin: I shall try to make it amusing. Social Security questions were rather dominated by a speech made by the Prime Minister that was released only at precisely 2.30 pm this afternoon. Is it not something of a discourtesy to the House that major policy announcements should be made away from the House, and at a time when we are discussing the very same subjects? Most right hon. and hon. Members do not have to hand the relevant material held by Ministers, which puts us at an unfair disadvantage and represents an abuse of the procedures of the House.

Madam Speaker: No, no. As far as I am concerned, the business of the House so far has been dominated by the Order Paper and questions that have been asked and answered across the Floor of the House. It is not for the Speaker of the House to determine when a Prime Minister makes a speech. No Prime Minister has ever consulted me about the time and date on which he is about to make a speech.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Many may have noticed that we have not had a statement before the House from the Prime Minister following either the Noordwijk European Council meeting or the NATO-Russian pact which was signed recently.

First, I suggest that that is unprecedented. Secondly, there is something rotten in the state of this country in the way in which we are being treated if we are to be subjected to such important decisions being taken without a statement being made to the House. There is a grave danger of the House being treated by this new Government with about as much contempt as Lord North and George I treated the American colonies in the 18th century.

Madam Speaker: Members on the Government Front Bench have no doubt noted what the hon. Gentleman said. Perhaps he might seek to catch my eye on Thursday at business questions. As he well knows, it is not for the Speaker to determine when statements are made; the Speaker is told when the Government wish to make statements. If he looks my way on Thursday, I shall do my best to call him.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During Social Security questions, 18 of the tabled questions were answered. Eleven of them were asked by my hon. Friends and seven by Opposition Members. Although those exchanges offered the official Opposition a massive opportunity to rise to ask questions, they failed to do so again and again. It was left to those on the nationalist and Liberal Benches to do that. Within a Parliament, should not an Opposition oppose and not decompose?

Madam Speaker: That was barely a point of order for me. I hope that the next one is.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will be aware that, during the recess, there was a major announcement about defence policy concerning a comprehensive review of our armed forces, which will include all aspects of its work and shape. That statement even contained comments about what sort of response the Government expected from the Opposition parties—most unusually for a Government statement. Surely it was a discourtesy to the House that that announcement was not communicated to the House in the ordinary way by means of a statement on the Floor of the House.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may like to take up that matter with the shadow Leader of the House through the usual channels. That is how decisions on statements are made.

Orders of the Day

Education (Schools) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

3.38 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I believe that I am right that the Bill was published in the recess. Having returned from the recess, we now find ourselves with that Bill; we are to debate its Second Reading today; and further proceedings on it could commence as early as Thursday. Are you satisfied that that time scale is proper and gives adequate time for hon. Members to consider the Bill properly and, in particular, to table amendments, and for outside interests to play their legitimate role? In the light of that, can you give us guidance about whether it would be appropriate to table manuscript amendments?

Madam Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman is not quite correct. If he looks at the back of the Bill, he will see that it was printed while we were still in session, on 22 May, giving the two full weekends that are normal and which I consider reasonably adequate. In answer to his last point, I think that about 14 days is long enough to table amendments, and I would not accept manuscript amendments.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The Bill was not available until the morning of 23 May, when, I believe, the House was in recess.

Madam Speaker: I was not aware of that, as it is printed on the Bill that it was available on 22 May. I take on board the right hon. Lady's point.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. The Bill has been introduced in undue haste and the Library tells me that there is no compliance cost assessment so we have to rely on the explanatory and financial memorandum. I believe that that memorandum is both incomplete and inaccurate: it does not cover the additional cost to the taxpayer of the increased numbers of children to be educated in the maintained sector; of increasing staff; and of the capital required to expand the system.

Can you advise me, Madam Speaker, whether we can proceed with a Bill that so obviously misleads us as to its financial implications and, more particularly, whether the proceedings this evening on the money resolution should be delayed pending a proper compliance cost assessment from the Government?

Madam Speaker: Let me deal with the last point first. The money resolution can adequately be dealt with, as has always been the case since the new procedures were introduced, in the discussions on the Bill. The other matters that the hon. Lady raised are matters for debate, and she should put her points to Ministers at the Dispatch Box to see what their response is.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. Before all this discussion ends, would not it be worth noting that it was not too long ago that the Tory Government introduced changes in procedure in the House? The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) might not have been listening, but the Tory Government got rid of the debates on money resolutions. We used to be able to speak for 45 minutes, but that lot got rid of the debates so everything goes through on the nod. What hypocrisy.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. If you get further points of order about these matters, perhaps you could refer hon. Members to the final chapter of my book, "How to Leave Office Gracefully (or, anyhow, as gracefully as possible)".

Madam Speaker: I have not reached the final chapter yet.

3.42 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): Neither have I, Madam Speaker.

I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Class size matters. We all know that it matters. Those who buy private education for their children know that it matters, as do those who applied to have private education for their children subsidised. Having agreed that it matters—

Mr. Forth: I have not.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position that he has not agreed, but the professional weight is against him, even if the physical weight is not. We, the profession, teachers and the majority of parents have agreed that class size matters. We must therefore ask: to which children does it matter? Does it matter to only a few or to all our children in all our schools?

The answer is very simple: we have a choice between excellence for a few or high-quality education for the many. We have made a choice in favour of the many, because we know that, both for the individuals concerned and for social cohesion and the economy, literacy and numeracy matter to every one of us. Giving children at the earliest stage of their education—at five, six and seven—the chance to succeed, to be taught well and to target their individual needs makes good common sense. If there are resources available, they should be targeted to ensure that all our children, wherever they live and whatever their background, have their opportunity. That is what the Bill is all about.

The Bill is a commitment to restoring the nation's confidence in the education system as a whole, rather than in one that believes that it can deliver excellence only to a tiny minority. In simple terms, the choice is between what the former Deputy Prime Minister described as children being able to "escape from" inner-city inadequacy and investing to ensure that that inadequacy is overcome. This afternoon, we must choose whether to set aside a scheme that has benefited only a tiny minority—in the forthcoming

[Mr. Blunkett]

academic year 36,000 children at the most—or to benefit the 450,000 youngsters who are in classes of more than 30 in the relevant age groups.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge) *rose—*

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry) *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) and then to the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Campbell: Is my right hon. Friend aware how important the Bill is to my constituency, especially to parents at Milton Road infant school, which had an excellent Ofsted report earlier this year but now has to implement £25,000 of cuts imposed by the previous Government? The sooner that we get the Bill into place, with more resources for primary schools, the better.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. It is worth emphasising that when the previous Government were proposing to impose even more draconian cuts in years ahead, they were prepared to double the assisted places scheme in circumstances that would have resulted in even bigger cuts to the majority of schools.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman on that point.

Mr. Foster: The Secretary of State said that the previous Government were planning further draconian cuts. Has not his Government accepted that they will follow through the previous Conservative Government's spending plans? Is he, for the first time, admitting to the House that, under a Labour Administration, there will be further draconian cuts to our schools?

Mr. Blunkett: I did not hear myself say that. I said that doubling the assisted places scheme would have taken additional money from the rest of the system and, therefore, from other children in other schools. I repeat the manifesto pledge that we stood on. We will not delude people that we can do it overnight, but we will spend a higher proportion of national income on education than did the previous regime. I have every intention that we will do that.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for giving way. I appreciate that he has some difficulty in identifying people across the Chamber. The Bill is silent on the mechanism whereby the resources that it seeks to save can be diverted to other parts of the education system. How will he put in place a mechanism to ensure that increased expenditure takes place when many Labour-controlled local authorities, such as Northamptonshire, have not passed on the extra money that was made available through the standard spending assessment to help with class sizes and schools? How will he achieve that when it was not possible under the previous Government? Will he infringe the rights of local authorities to do it?

Mr. Blunkett: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I do not have to see his face to give way to him and that I do not need patronising by anyone. I am always happy to take voices and give way as appropriate.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the standard spending assessment. The previous Government appeared not to understand the difference between SSA, which is an assessment of what the central Government believe should be spent locally, and the revenue support grant, which backs that up.

It is time that we got the cards well and truly on the table. Had it not been for Labour local authorities, and those supported by the Liberal Democrats, spending about £500 million a year more than the previous Government's SSA, there would have been enormous further cuts in the education system across the country. SSA and revenue support grant are not one and the same thing. Increasing SSA, but then expecting social services to be cut and highways not to be repaired is something that we need to address.

We shall not be able to put that right overnight or in the next 12 months—we made that clear in the run-up to the election—but a degree of honesty about what is happening and the difficulties faced by local authorities would not come amiss. It is my intention to ensure that there is transparency in what we do in the months and years ahead.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it ill-behoves Opposition Members to start to make a fuss about the accuracy of SSAs for student numbers, when, during their period of Government, they made no assessment of SSAs in relation to the increased numbers of students in our schools, year upon year upon year?

Mr. Blunkett: That is an extremely good point and answers entirely the point of order made before the start of the debate. Over the past 10 years, under the previous Government, there was an increase of 450,000 in the number of pupils in state schools and a drop in the number of teachers of approximately 6,000. In other words, the Conservatives put in less money when there were almost half a million extra children in our schools. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer indicated that the marginal cost was so small that it was discountable. The Opposition cannot have it both ways, and they will not have it both ways, either this afternoon or in the foreseeable future, and the nation must be greatly relieved that that is so.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): May I add to what my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said? It is a matter not simply of SSAs, but of the ability of local education authorities to pass money through to schools. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) spoke of cuts in a school in her constituency, yet she will know that a Conservative administration in Cambridgeshire, which was returned on 1 May, is setting about the task of increasing the delegation to schools by £3 million. That dwarfs the amount of money that would be made available by

the abolition of the assisted places scheme. That is the right way to go about reducing class sizes—through more efficient expenditure.

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government are committed to raising the floor of delegation to 90 per cent., which the Conservatives did not do when in office. However, I have to make it clear that increased delegation should not come at the expense of key and core services such as provision for those with special needs, and we shall protect those services in future.

Let me address directly the issue before us—the assisted places scheme. The Opposition have often claimed that the worse-off benefited from the application of the assisted places scheme; yet a third of those who are currently receiving an assisted place were already in the private sector when those places were applied for and received. They were already paying and felt able to pay for a private sector place—what the former hon. Member for Buckingham, Mr. George Walden, used to describe in several areas of education policy as "dead weight". We have therefore established that some now in receipt of a subsidy did not previously believe that one was needed.

The claim that the poor and the dispossessed are those who benefit is also set aside by the private sector's own research, which found that more than half of those currently receiving an assisted place were described as either middle class or upper middle class in terms of their socio-economic background.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): As I understand the figures from the House of Commons Library, 42 per cent. of the 37,600 parents who send their children to school through the assisted places scheme earn less than £10,000 per annum. They are the underprivileged. I wonder how the Secretary of State feels about taking that away from them?

Mr. Blunkett: The net income of the individual is taken into account, not earnings. As the former Tory Member for Buckingham, Mr. Walden, rightly said in this place, when Lloyd's names find themselves eligible for assisted places and when others find themselves with enormous capital assets following separation or divorce from an extremely wealthy former partner, as a result of a clean-break settlement, they can apply for and receive assisted places. Against that background, who is benefiting from the scheme? That is my point. The better-off seem to be doing pretty well out of the scheme, and have done so over the past 16 years.

The previous Member for Buckingham made a comment that sums up the way that we feel about the scheme. He said that there were only two things wrong with it: the principle and the practice. I cannot put it more succinctly than that.

The practice discriminates and prevents resources from being applied to the many. We know that the principle has been to deny the opportunity that we all seek, including even many Opposition Members, to transform the education service so that we do not have to have a two-tier system, and certainly not the belief that only a few can benefit from the service.

We are dealing with a scheme that, in every essence, is flawed. Substantial sums have been applied to very few children. The amount of money directed to individual places under the scheme massively exceeds the amount of money that is available to children in the state sector.

The current average under the standard spending assessment is £2,730 for a secondary school child in the state sector. The average of the assisted places contribution results in a fee of £4,100 being paid. That rises to well in excess of £10,000 in some of the 477 schools that are helped in England, as well as a small number of schools in Scotland and Wales. The Bill obviously applies to schools in Scotland and Wales as well.

Schools are benefiting from a substantial subsidy. The amount paid through the assisted places scheme for individual children is, on average, almost 50 per cent. in excess of what is available to the average child in a secondary school in our neighbourhoods. It is no wonder that parents think that the scheme is a good deal. I do not blame any parent wishing to see his or her child being educated in smaller classes with better equipment and with the ethos that many of us would want to see for ourselves.

I believe, however, that we have an obligation as a Government to ensure that that ethos, those class sizes and that equipment become available over time to our children as well as to others. In that way, we can transform education. At the same time, we can apply resources carefully and in a targeted fashion to best practice in all our schools.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Secretary of State has just said that it is his ambition to take the ethos of private schools into the state system. Is he giving us a commitment that it is his ambition to reduce class sizes in the state sector to those that are found in the private sector, which means that we are talking about class sizes of 20 pupils in both primary and secondary schools?

Mr. Blunkett: I have an ambition for excellence for our children in our schools. The Government's endeavour over, God and the electorate willing, and a similar life to that enjoyed by the previous Government, will be to reverse what I described earlier as the appalling legacy of 450,000 more children and 6,000 fewer teachers. That is the legacy which we inherited following literally two decades of neglect. It will take us time to reverse that, but our ambitions should be high and our endeavour clear so that we can set about doing the job that the previous Government neglected.

We have seen class sizes rise—last Friday, the Minister for School Standards announced, in our statistical submission, that the pupil-teacher ratio had worsened once again. Over the past 10 years, there has been a substantial worsening of the PTR in both our primary and secondary schools. Again, that is another legacy which we have to address.

It is very simple really. The Bill enables us to reuse resources so that we can give that life chance, that beginning, to our children, and ensure that they do not feel that they have—in the words of the former Deputy Prime Minister—to escape.

Clause 1 ends the duty on the Secretary of State to operate the scheme, and that we will do from the next academic year.

Clauses 2 and 3 put in place arrangements to phase out the scheme, and provide for regulations to prescribe the transitional provisions that are required.

[Mr. Blunkett]

Clause 4 deals with the definitions in the Bill.

Clause 5 enables us, because of the different education and legal system in Scotland, to apply the Bill to Scotland as well.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): On clause 2, is the Secretary of State aware that, just a month before the election, prep school head teachers asked the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), who was then the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on education, whether assisted places schemes for children at prep schools would continue up to age of 13? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the hon. Gentleman, speaking on behalf of the Labour party, said:

"If a child has a place at a school which runs to age 13, then that place will be honoured through to 13"?

Why is the Secretary of State going back on that pledge in clause 2 and finishing education at the age of 11? Is that not the clearest example of a breach of promise?

Mr. Blunkett: I have the letter from my hon. Friend to Mr. Davies-Jones of St. Andrew's school in Eastbourne and am aware of what he said. I am very clear, and so is the Bill, that assisted places will remain in primary education up to the normal age of transfer at 11. Where an alternative transfer age applies in that area, the Secretary of State will have discretion, and my ministerial team and I will use it wisely, to ensure that we do not have a situation where 500,000 youngsters transfer at 11, but other people think that they can transfer at 13, even if 13 is not the normal transferable age in that locality. It would not do the children a favour if we pretended that we could do that. Discretion is the better part of valour, and we will use it wisely.

The Bill is more than simply a transfer of resources and a way of lowering class sizes; it is an article of good faith. It is about indicating to Britain as a whole that the Government have a different set of values and a different intent in terms of the way in which we address the needs of the individual and the needs of the nation for many years to come.

We believe that we can succeed in our education system. We believe that we can spread best practice from the best schools to the rest. We believe that we can learn from what is happening in the rest of the world and apply it to this country, which is why we have established the standards in effectiveness unit, and why I have established the new standards task force.

I believe that we can do it. Those who do not will want and encourage people to opt out. I know that we will not be able to set aside a private sector for education in this country. We can ask it to work with us. We can seek co-operation, and we will, but, in the end, we will succeed as a nation not if we have trickle down from the better off to the rest, or if only a few succeed and the others are faced with mediocrity—but only if every child and every family knows that they are valued and that their success is our success, because in the end that is what it is all about. We sink or swim together. It is not a few—five, 10 or even 20 per cent.—being able to carry other people because they have done very well for themselves. It is about the 80, 85 and 90 per cent. who have, for too long, carried people who have done very well at their expense.

It is time to start afresh, with the choice that we have made today: not a low-tech, low-wage, low-added-value economy, but the very reverse: a Britain that believes in itself; a Britain that is prepared to invest in the future of our children and our country; a Britain that makes the choice that it is the many who will carry us forward, and not the success of the few.

4.4 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South–West Norfolk): The Bill is the first element of the new Government's education programme, and today gives me my first opportunity to make it clear at the outset that we shall support any constructive attempt by the Government to develop and build on the work that we did in raising education standards.

The Secretary of State has heard me say many times, in the House and elsewhere, that high education and skills levels are vital for individuals and for the nation, and he agrees. That is why, through our guiding principles of transparency and accountability, choice and diversity, we put in place the framework on which the right hon. Gentleman can now build.

We introduced transparency through inspection, performance tables, testing, reform of teacher training, qualifications for head teachers and measures for failing schools. We introduced accountability, with more freedom for schools, colleges and universities to manage their own affairs, target setting and more involvement for parents and local communities. We provided choice and diversity within the system, through a variety of schools—comprehensive, grant-maintained, specialist and so on—and a variety of routes for individual pupils: selective schools and the assisted places scheme.

Those principles of transparency, accountability and choice and diversity help to drive up standards, and standards are rising. We have seen year-on-year improvements in examination results; we have seen a revolution in access to higher education; we have seen steadily improving vocational routes. The Secretary of State is fortunate to have inherited a framework that is so firmly in place. We shall expect him and his team to try to improve it still further, and when the Government offer constructive and practical proposals to raise standards, we shall support them in their aims.

However, we reject the Government's clearly held view—so well illustrated by this mean little Bill—that choice, the freedom to make that choice, diversity of types of school and diversity of routes for individual pupils should be replaced by centrally planned uniformity. When the Government's proposals are driven by dogma, when they support that central planning at the expense of parental choice and when they self-evidently will not deliver what is promised, we shall strongly oppose them.

Let us set the Bill against those criteria. Is it driven by dogma? Does it restrict choice and the freedom to choose, thereby driving down standards and destroying excellence? Will it deliver what it promises? For the answer to the first question, we need only consider why a Conservative Government introduced the assisted places scheme. In 1976, in the International Monetary Fund-driven heyday of the previous Labour Government, the then Secretary of State for Education and Science—now a Member of another place and of another party—abolished the 200 direct grant schools in England and Wales.

Many of those schools had prided themselves for centuries on their tradition of educating a broad cross-section of the community, a tradition greatly prized by schools such as Colston's girls school in Bristol, Bradford grammar school, Leeds grammar school and many more—including Thetford grammar school in my constituency. Old Labour failed in its attempt to destroy that tradition in the 1970s, but, dogma-driven still, new Labour is returning to the attack in the 1990s, still persuaded of the view that, if all cannot have, none should.

Secondly, the Bill restricts parental choice. Its purpose is to remove from children in families on low incomes the opportunity of independent schooling and a different route.

Amid the avalanche—the myriad words uttered on every possible subject, at all hours of the day and night, by members of the Government since 1 May—two words have been strangely absent. They are "freedom" and "choice". Some members of the Government value and exercise choice for themselves and for their children, but those freedoms are not to be extended to everyone else's children, and most certainly not to able children from poorer families via the assisted places scheme.

Last year, close on 38,000 places were offered, and we put in place plans to double that number. Contrary to what the Secretary of State said in his uncharacteristically sneering comments, more than 80 per cent. of parents with children on the scheme earn less than the national average. He is hostile to choice. It was, after all, he who said that he would have no truck with middle-class, left-wing parents who preach one thing and send their children to another school outside the area. He should not be hostile to excellence.

The assisted places scheme achieves excellent results. In 1995, assisted places pupils achieved pass rates of more than 94 per cent. in both GCSE and A-level. A London School of Economics study has shown that, in 1995–96, assisted places pupils attained A-level results up to three grades higher than other pupils.

Mr. Blunkett: I hope that the right hon. Lady will take it the right way when I say that she is making a much better speech than she used to make when she was in government. Will she confirm that in only one of the three indicators used in the LSE study was the difference statistically significant? Therefore, there was no provable difference, despite the fact that enormous sums of money had been spent on those pupils.

Mrs. Shephard: No, I do not accept that. There is no question but that assisted places pupils do extremely well at GCSE and A-level. Contrary to what the right hon. Gentleman said, they achieved A-level results up to three grades higher than other pupils.

I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind compliment. It is his turn to be a touch patronising, but I dare say that it is because of the car and the building, and he will get over it.

Mr. Boswell: I promise that I shall not patronise my right hon. Friend: indeed, I would not patronise any hon. Member. Did she notice that the Secretary of State referred to his welcome readiness to work alongside the private sector in the interest of improving standards? Does she believe that the Bill will break the links between the private and the state sectors in education? How can it possibly contribute to forging those links?

Mrs. Shephard: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. The provisions of the Bill and the indecent haste with which it has been introduced—it was published after the House had gone into recess, and we have only a meagre amount of time to prepare for Committee stage and Third Reading—show that the Government are perhaps a touch ashamed that they are destroying the scheme. I believe that the Bill will also destroy the good relations with the independent sector that some members of the Government claim they want to develop.

Ms Hodge: The right hon. Lady may find it a little difficult to have a Government who so swiftly keep to their pledges, which is what the Bill is all about. Will she explain why, during 18 years of Conservative government, no attempts were made to extend, beyond the assisted places scheme, the partnership between the public and private sectors? That might have broken down the divide that we have inherited as part of the legacy.

Mrs. Shephard: I hope to show how the Bill cannot deliver what it promises, despite the fact that the Labour party had 18 years in which to prepare it.

The Bill is driven by class-envy dogma. It restricts choice, the freedom to choose, and it destroys excellence. It fails to recognise the contribution that choice, variety of school and variety of route make to raising standards.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): The right hon. Lady says that we are restricting the choice of 38,000 children. The Bill that she lost at the end of the previous Session was proposed that schools could select up to 50 per cent. of pupils. What effect would that have had on parental choice? Would not it have affected the choice of many more parents than will be affected by the Bill?

Mrs. Shephard: I am happy to say to the hon. Gentleman that the nature and exercise of choice is well understood by some Government Front Benchers. It is a great pity that they do not choose to exercise that principle to benefit all parents. Of course, none of that should surprise us, because at local level Labour mounted street demonstrations, supported by Labour Members, against the setting up of city technology colleges. At local level, it would not allow pupils from grant-maintained schools to play games against pupils from maintained schools, and it forced grammar school pupils to pay for their own transport to school. Labour is hostile to choice and diversity.

Mr. Steen: When my right hon. Friend was Secretary of State for Education and Employment—and what a splendid job she did—she visited my former constituency of South Hams. She may remember that she visited two very good secondary schools. Can she say how 1,011 children currently on assisted places in Devon can be accommodated in the secondary schools in my constituency, which are full to capacity? As I understand

[Mr. Steen]

it, the only way in which that could be done would be by increasing class sizes or building more schools. How does my right hon. Friend see that happening?

Mrs. Shephard: One of the joys of opposition is that I do not have to reply to such questions. However, the Government do have to respond, and I intend to ask them those questions later.

It is one thing, for reasons of class-envy driven dogma, to destroy choice, opportunity and excellence, but it is quite another to do that in the name of a reform which so far has not been costed or quantified, the timing of which cannot be predicted, the mechanism for which has not been devised and which in short, cannot and will not be delivered.

Under the heading "Financial effects of the Bill", it is claimed:

"The Bill's provisions . . . will be spent on reducing infant class sizes in the maintained sector."

We note that the compliance cost assessment has not been placed in the Library. Ten days ago, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment could not tell the House, because he did not know, the cost of educating assisted place pupils in the maintained sector if they are returned to it. It must be deduced that the Government's idea of the cost and the timetable for achieving class size reduction is at best hazy. That brings me to my third criterion, that of judging the effectiveness of the Bill—will it work? The Government cannot save enough money from abolishing the assisted places scheme to enable them to reduce primary class sizes, as they promised, during the lifetime of this Parliament. As the National Association of Head Teachers has said, even if the money were available, and it will not be, the policy could work only if the Government put in place measures to restrict admissions to primary schools, which would be yet another blow to choice.

The Secretary of State and the Government have some questions to answer during the disgracefully short passage of this destructive Bill. I noted that the right hon. Gentleman failed to answer the question about the pledge by the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, who wrote to the chairman of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools, stating:

"If a child has a place at a school which runs through to age 13, then that place will be honoured through to 13."

The hon. Gentleman is not here today, adorning the Government Front Bench. He has been banished to the inner recesses of the Cabinet Office where, so we are told, he languishes unhappily. Fancy sending him to Lancaster just because he is going to break a promise.

As we have consistently pointed out—and here we are in the company of the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales, the Government's adviser on these matters, and the Institute of Public Finance—the sums do not add up. Both bodies agree that the annual cost of reducing primary school class sizes would amount to around £65 million. The IPF has also calculated that, by 1999–2000, the savings released from the abolition of the assisted places scheme would amount in total to only £34 million. In short, by the time the full assisted places savings are realised, there will be a shortfall to the public purse of £250 million.

I noticed at oral questions that we are to be promised a White Paper and that the answers will be found in the White Paper. What a relief to us all, but the House is owed answers to some of these questions this afternoon. How will the financial shortfall be met? What is the timetable for the reduction of primary class sizes? What mechanisms will be used? What changes will be made to the standard numbers assessments, to the powers of admission authorities and to the appeals mechanism? How will parental choice will preserved?

The House is today being asked to agree the destruction of the centuries-old tradition of some of our most illustrious schools to provide for a full cross-section of pupils. It is being asked to agree to the destruction of choice and of the freedom to choose a different route for many thousands of children from less well-off families.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): If the right hon. Lady is so concerned about private schools not taking in working-class children, does she think that private schools will offer free places to working-class children out of their own budgets to allow for that cross-section of society in those schools?

Mrs. Shephard: Some of those schools do, as the hon. Gentleman should understand, with his knowledge of education, but it must be obvious even to him that the assisted places scheme has extended that opportunity to many more pupils.

As I said, the House today is being asked to agree a destruction process—the destruction of those schools, of their policy of encouraging a cross-section of pupils, of choice and of the freedom to choose. It is, at best, grossly incompetent and, at worst, breathtakingly high-handed—even for this Government—for the House to be asked to agree the Bill before the consequent implications and costs can be laid before it.

I said at the outset that we shall support the Government where they introduce policies that are constructive and raise standards. I suggested three criteria by which their legislation should be judged: is it driven by dogma; does it restrict choice and the freedom to choose, thereby driving down standards; and can it work? Not a word about the way in which the changes would be achieved has been heard from the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. This mean-minded Bill fails all three tests. It is faithful to the old Labour dogma: if all cannot have, none should. It destroys choice and excellence in the name of improvements that are not costed, not tested, cannot be promised and will not be delivered. We oppose the Bill.

4.23 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on his appointment and on introducing the Bill so speedily. It is an important election pledge and it is being implemented within a month of the Government taking office.

I listened with interest to the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) opposing the Bill. I was interested in some of the concepts, or rather her interpretation of those concepts. She accused my right hon. Friend of imposing centrally planned uniformity.

What is the assisted places scheme if it is not a centrally planned scheme imposed by the Government on local authorities throughout the country?

The right hon. Lady spoke about taking away freedom of choice. She has a bizarre concept of freedom of choice. The assisted places scheme consists not of freedom of choice, not of freedom of the many to choose, but of the freedom of a tiny minority to be chosen. I do not regard that as freedom of choice.

The right hon. Lady said that my right hon. Friend was removing the possibility of the assisted places schools having a full cross-section of society. Again, it is a interesting concept. A small number of pupils—between 30,000 and 40,000—does not strike me as a full cross-section. Certainly, in the schools in my constituency that are involved in the scheme, there is not a full cross-section of society.

The Bill is the reverse of what the right hon. Lady said. It sends a signal not only about the Government's attitude to education, but about their attitude to the nature of society—not winnowing out a small number of children to have privileges conferred upon them, but maximising the opportunity of all pupils to realise their abilities.

The Bill is especially important to my constituency. It has high unemployment, with extraordinarily high youth unemployment, and deprivation and poverty prevail far more than they should. There are three assisted places schools in the constituency—Manchester grammar school, Manchester high school for girls and William Hulme's grammar school. Over the past seven years, those three schools have received £13 million from the taxpayer under the assisted places scheme. That compares with just under £24 million in the past financial year for all 39 state schools in the constituency.

Last year, each assisted places school received an average of £709,000 in public money; each school in the state sector received an average of £614,000 in public money. We must remember that that state funding of £709,000 for the assisted schools is in addition to their already ample funding from private sources. By contrast, the state funding for the 39 schools in the state sector—13 per cent. below the state funding for the assisted places schools—was all that they received; that was their lot. Some £1,658.58 per head was spend on the 14,205 pupils in the state sector schools, while £3,219.36 per head—almost double—was spent on the assisted places scheme pupils.

What about numbers? There were 14,205 pupils in the state sector schools in my constituency in the last school year. In the three assisted places schools there were 661 pupils, but of those only 95 were resident in my constituency. The rest came from elsewhere. Young people studying at the three assisted places schools in my constituency had an average journey time of 40 or 50 minutes. Only 95 pupils resident in my constituency were in assisted places compared with a total of 14,205 pupils in the state sector.

I should make it clear that I have nothing against the three assisted places schools in my constituency, and I have very good personal relations with their head teachers—or high master, as the head of Manchester grammar school is called. I have been invited to the schools on many occasions and have accepted those invitations. The schools certainly provide an education commensurate with their overall funding and—as the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) said—with their class sizes. Some of their facilities clearly demonstrate the contrast between funding schools with assisted places and funding those in the state sector. The ample playing fields of Manchester grammar school, which is right in the heart of my constituency, contrast with the thwarted yearning of those at Spurley Hey high school to get their hands on a filled-in clay pit that is next to the school. That example demonstrates both the contrast and the opportunity.

A couple of months ago, I was invited by the headmistress of Manchester high school for girls to visit the school, and I accepted. I was met with the utmost courtesy, which I am sure was inherently in the nature of the headmistress, although it may have had other connotations. I had a feeling that my invitation was not entirely unconnected with the possibility that the House might consider legislation such as the Education (Schools) Bill.

I was shown the facilities for teaching music at Manchester high school for girls, and I was deeply impressed. I saw a row of soundproofed rooms, each with its own piano, and I contrasted that with the recent experience of Stanley Grove school, where staff had to give music lessons on the stairs. It may well be that Manchester high school for girls has a better academic record in music than does Stanley Grove school, yet I know that the pupils at Stanley Grove, if given a chance, are just as bright, eager, hopeful, ambitious and talented as those at Manchester high school for girls.

On Saturday 14 May 1997, the under-13s team of the excellent Wright Robinson high school—which is a state school in my constituency—won the Auto-Windscreen school shield at Wembley, by beating 713 other schools from across the country. When I visited Manchester high school for girls, however, one of the assisted places girls told me that if she had not been awarded an assisted place, she would have had to attend Wright Robinson, and spoke as if that were a fate to be avoided if at all possible. That is the type of attitude that has been inculcated in good young people by that assisted places school.

Today, I have written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—I give him notice of it—in support of Wright Robinson's application to become a sports college. I am sure that he will agree that that school's success at Wembley the weekend before last reinforces its already impregnable case to achieve such status.

The money saved by ending the assisted places scheme could provide an additional two teachers at every state school in my constituency. I want that money to go to the many and not to the few—to the 14,205 and not to the 95. In my election address at the general election, I made my strong advocacy for ending the assisted places scheme absolutely clear. I made my position clear also at all seven meetings that I addressed during the general election—including four meetings in which other candidates participated—and in discussions with constituents individually. No one in the Gorton constituency could have been in any doubt about my attitude to or ardour for that key Labour policy or for the Bill, which, admirably, has been introduced so swiftly.

The parents of the 14,000 not only pay taxes to educate their own children but pay extra taxes to provide opportunities for the 95 which are not available to their

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

own children. They pay to educate their own children and they pay extra to provide opportunities for other children which are not available to their own.

This is an excellent Bill, because it narrows the gap between the unduly privileged and the underprivileged, a gap that was created and then widened under the Tory Government. I support the Bill because it redistributes taxpayers' money from the few to the many. I support it because it redistributes taxpayers' money from the private sector to the public sector. It is a sensible, forward-looking and necessary Bill. It substitutes justice for discrimination. In short, it is a socialist Bill and, as such, it has my support.

4.35 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, and to speak so early. I listened intently to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and although I do not doubt for a moment the genuineness of his commitment to improve standards in education and provide greater opportunity for all children in his constituency, I fear that he is still wedded to the old-fashioned socialist dogma that greater diversity and choice and the capacity for innovation in the provision of education are the enemies of higher quality. Like the Government, he still seems committed to the notion of uniformity and levelling down. That is a clear illustration of the difference between the Government and the Opposition.

It is a tragedy that the last Labour Government removed direct grant status from the three Manchester schools that the right hon. Member for Gorton mentioned and that the present Government now wish to abolish the assisted places scheme. This will disadvantage academically gifted pupils who would otherwise have benefited from that education.

Some of the points that I shall make this afternoon can perhaps be dealt with at greater length in Committee on Thursday. I preface my remarks by saying that I do not doubt the commitment of the Secretary of State—or, indeed, that of the Minister for School Standards or the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), both of whom I have had some dealings with in the past—to increase opportunities and improve standards in education. I hope that, if not on this Bill, there will be instances of cross-party agreement on how to improve the quality of education in state schools, but I am fundamentally opposed to the Government's proposals.

I will comment first on the arithmetic that underlies the Government's proposals and the claim that the abolition of the assisted places scheme will somehow make it possible significantly to improve the quality of education for children at key stage 1 in state schools. The Government claim that savings will total £100 million by the year 2000, but their analysis assumes that the pupils who would otherwise have been educated under the assisted places scheme can be absorbed into the state sector with no corresponding increase in resources. It assumes that there will be no need to recruit additional teachers to state schools, to build additional classrooms and laboratories or to provide additional sports facilities for the 34,000 pupils who, on the Government's assumptions, will have to move to the state sector within a few years.

Independent assessments by the Institute of Public Finance suggest a significant discrepancy between the savings claimed from the assisted places scheme and the cost of the class size reduction proposed by the Government—a discrepancy amounting to £250 million by the time that full savings from the assisted places scheme are realised. The Government must come forward with a more coherent explanation of their arithmetic to persuade the House that their proposals will provide the reduction in class size and the improvement in education quality that they claim.

Mr. Steinberg: Will the hon. Gentleman give us statistics on how many extra children, on average, each local authority will have to cater for?

Mr. Lidington: It would be helpful if the Government published such figures as part of their compliance cost assessment. If they were not proceeding with the Bill with such indecent haste, we would have an opportunity for a full debate on the merits of the Government's proposals and the arithmetic behind them—a debate that Conservative Members want.

Mr. Steinberg: The hon. Gentleman's argument seems to be based on local education authorities' need for extra money to cater for pupils leaving the assisted places scheme. He must be able to tell us how many children are to be catered for, because his argument depends on that. How many children, on average, will each local education authority have to cater for?

Mr. Lidington: That is for the Government to explain. I have crossed swords with the hon. Gentleman in the past in the Education Select Committee. He is falling into the error of thinking that he is still on the Opposition Back Benches. He may indeed still think of himself as being on the Opposition Benches, and his right hon. Friends may realise that in due course. His Government have come forward with legislation that they are asking the House to endorse. It is for the Government to provide the detailed analysis that he has demanded and to explain how they propose to make it possible, through the local authority grant system or some other mechanism, for each local education authority to match the additional demand which, as the hon. Gentleman implies, will clearly vary a great deal from one part of the country to another.

I want to deal with the more general issue of the value placed on smaller class sizes. Any parent or teacher—or anyone married to a teacher, as I am—knows that common sense tells us that smaller class sizes are desirable in principle. I see the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) nodding, which is all that he is now allowed to do in his elevated but mute role in the Government Whips Office.

The Government must answer some serious questions. Most of the claims about the benefits of smaller class sizes in the early years are founded on the Star project from the state of Tennessee, which found significant benefits in reducing class sizes for infants. However, that study was based on reducing class sizes to 15 or 16 pupils—a much greater reduction than any aspired to by the Government.

In its 1995 study entitled, "Class Size and the Quality of Education", the Office for Standards in Education cast doubt on the benefits of reductions in class sizes unless the reductions were of the scale proposed by the Star

researchers. The conclusion of the chief inspector, in whom we know that the Secretary of State still has a great deal of confidence, was that a reduction in average class size was probably not the best way to bring about an improvement in standards of education in state schools—it was not the single most important use of whatever additional resources were available to the Government.

Mr. Kaufman: Would the hon. Gentleman recommend that the three assisted places schools in my constituency increase their effectiveness by increasing their class sizes?

Mr. Lidington: That is a matter for the schools concerned.

The Ofsted study assessed that the cost of reducing the average class size in nursery, reception and key stage 1 classes by just three would be £250 million. I hope that when the Minister of State winds up he will be able to say whether the Government accept the chief inspector's assessment of the approximate cost of the class size reductions that they are proposing. The cost of reducing classes to the size recommended by the Star research project was £1.2 billion. Not even the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) is yet proposing to spend quite that amount on that reform.

Will a reduction in class sizes make much of a difference on its own? In a report published a couple of years ago, the National Commission on Education came out in favour of giving a high priority to reducing class sizes for early years pupils. However, it added a rider. Briefing paper No. 12, on class size, which I believe was written by Professor Mortimore of the Institute of Education, says that the benefits seen as arising from reduced class sizes will not come about automatically, but only

"if teachers alter their behaviour and classroom organisation".

It is not possible to consider the issue simply in terms of numbers. We must also consider the quality of leadership from the head teacher, the style of classroom teaching and the way in which learning is organised in a classroom to determine whether reducing the number of pupils in a class will make much difference.

I am concerned that the apparent priority given by the Government to this one indicator risks a mechanistic approach. Many detailed questions must be answered. It is not satisfactory to expect the House to vote the Bill through and wait for all the details to be revealed miraculously in a White Paper in a couple of months' time.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) referred to the impact of the Government's proposals on standard numbers for admissions. That is a matter of huge importance for parents in every part of the country.

I remember being a governor of a comprehensive school in north London before open enrolment was adopted as Conservative Government policy. I remember how the admission limits on popular schools were held artificially low because it was convenient for the local education authority to manage things in that way. Will we see artificial limits imposed once again on admissions to popular schools? If so, Labour policy will indeed be revealed as selection—selection by the depth of a parent's pocket in terms of ability to buy a house within the catchment area of the school to which he or she wishes to send his or her child. Labour's policy will lead to a bonanza for estate agents, but to a narrowing of choice for parents and, above all, to a narrowing of choice for parents with modest incomes who cannot afford to pick and choose which house to move to.

What will happen to the appeals system under the Government's proposal? If parents cannot get their child into the school of their first preference, they go to the LEA's panel. How do the Government propose to constrain the appeals panels to ensure that their decisions on individual cases do not push a class size above the level prescribed by the Department for Education and Employment?

Will smaller class sizes be the best approach even if they mean that a head teacher will have to mix year groups to comply with the numbers handed down from on high? How will the statistics for measuring class size take account of the deployment by heads of teaching assistants in larger classes? The pupil-teacher ratio is an inexact measure of what is going on in individual schools.

I would see more logic in the Government's approach if they talked about finding additional resources for primary schools, from wherever in their spending plans they proposed, to be used at the discretion of the heads and governors. I suspect that what is really needed in many schools is an additional staff post rather than an arbitrary limit on the number of children who can be educated in a particular classroom.

The Secretary of State said in his opening remarks that the assisted places scheme benefited relatively few children. The corollary of that remark is that the abolition of the scheme will disadvantage children, albeit a relatively small number, who would otherwise have been able to enjoy an enhanced level of academic education. Neither the Government's arguments nor their arithmetic give us much confidence that their policy will deliver the improvements in the quality of primary education that they have promised.

We know that their policy will harm the few, and I see no evidence that it will help the many. Worse than that, the Secretary of State's logic and his arguments about levelling down could be used in relation to city technology colleges or any other type of school where selection is made by aptitude. The argument seems to be that, if everyone cannot benefit, no one should be able to benefit.

There is another route. Labour Members made the jibe that when my party was in office it did not work out a way in which to forge a new partnership between the independent and state sectors of education, ad there is some point in that comment. Although I did not agree with everything said by my former constituency neighbour Mr. George Walden—I did not agree with him on the assisted places scheme—I believe that in his recent book he came forward with an imaginative idea to try to bring the benefits of the highly selective, highly academic education provided by many independent schools to a much larger number of pupils than can currently benefit through the assisted places scheme.

I would have liked the Government to follow that route rather than the negative and small-minded measure that they are presenting to the House today. I look forward to my party developing Mr. Walden's ideas so that we can present them to the electorate in future as one ingredient in an education policy that will attract the support and capture the imagination of the British people.

4.54 pm

Ms Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech during our consideration of this important Bill. To be able to stand here today as the new Member of Parliament for Don Valley and to speak on behalf of my constituents for the first time is a humbling experience—humbling because I am here by the grace and good will of the people of Don Valley and because my predecessor, Martin Redmond, who served the people of Don Valley for 14 hard years of opposition, was deprived of the opportunity to stand here as a new era of Labour Government begins.

In the 10 weeks from my selection as candidate to polling day, I learnt much from the people of Don Valley about Martin. A private man, he remained living in the same village that was his home. He remained friends with the people he knew from before his election. He made time for individuals and he was regarded with warmth and affection. In his maiden speech in July 1983, Martin was able proudly to describe Don Valley's main industry as coal mining. Now we can but say that coal mining is part of the heart and character of Don Valley, but that it is no longer the main employer. Martin saw the heavy price paid by the mining communities that are strung from east to west of the constituency as their industry closed without the necessary foresight and investment needed to build a new economic life to replace the old.

Like many constituents who supported new Labour on 1 May, Martin Redmond understood the value of work. He believed in reward for hard work, in the respect and achievement derived from a lifetime of work and in the dignity that should be the rightful reward to be enjoyed in retirement. Martin understood the corrosive effects of persistent unemployment and the dangers of enforced idleness. He criticised the insecurity that seemed to be built into too many jobs.

Martin Redmond witnessed a Britain divided between the haves and have-nots—those with work and those without, and those with opportunities and those without. Martin Redmond would have been proud of the start that this new Labour Government have made—the concerted plan to tackle youth unemployment and the plan to shorten NHS waiting lists. He would have been as proud as I am to welcome this Bill, which will make good the key pledge on class sizes for which Labour has received a clear mandate.

Don Valley's history is steeped in mining. Every previous Member of Parliament came from mining and I pay tribute to them all. Indeed, in 70 years, the constituency has had but five Members of Parliament. James Walton, a miner, was the first Member of Parliament to represent the constituency from 1918 to 1922. He was the only Labour candidate in the history of Don Valley to have the unofficial support of the Conservatives.

I would love to boast that I am the youngest Member of Parliament in Don Valley's history, but I am not. Tom Williams, later Baron Williams, was elected in 1922 at the age of 34. I would love to aspire to be the constituency's longest-serving Member of Parliament, but Tom Williams served 37 years, until 1959, and I cannot imagine having such a substantial tenure. He served through great and turbulent times; his seventh general election victory was in 1945. As the right hon. Tom Williams, he then served as Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries until 1959. He made a distinguished contribution to the House and I would be proud to be mentioned on the same page in the history books.

Tom Williams was succeeded by Dick Kelley, who served the people of Don Valley for 20 years. In his maiden speech, in November 1959, Dick Kelley was concerned for the economic survival of the village communities he represented. He pleaded:

"These villages must be kept alive."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 1959; Vol. 613, c. 72.]

In the weeks leading up to the 1997 election, that view was expressed to me many times.

I am most grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for having been allowed to make this speech so soon after my election to this House. I would love to have claimed that I was the quickest of the six Don Valley Members to have made a maiden speech, but that honour remains with Mick Welsh, who was Member of Parliament from 1979 to 1983 and who was later the Member for Doncaster, North. He addressed the House just 20 days after the general election. In his maiden speech, Michael Welsh celebrated the genuine community life of the mining villages of Don Valley. Those men embraced, celebrated and championed Don Valley's culture and communities for the best part of a century. I celebrate it, too.

Don Valley is a changing constituency. It is perhaps fitting that I am the first woman to represent it. I am not from a mining background. At the time of my selection, try as I might to discover that a distant grandparent had once spent a long weekend in Don Valley, I could not. I determined then that honesty was the only policy. My curriculum vitae announced,

"I won't try to kid you that I'm from South Yorkshire. I'm not."

Labour party members, and subsequently the electorate, welcomed me with warmth and friendliness to put down roots in the constituency, as they did for so many people before who moved from the four corners of the United Kingdom to make Don Valley their home. Indeed, I am very proud to have been made a life member of the Official's club in Edlington, and to have been presented with a badge bearing the white rose of Yorkshire and welcomed as an honorary Yorkshirewoman.

In his 1941 book about Don Valley entitled "Old King Coal", Robert W. L. Ward wrote:

"Men from Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Durham, Northumberland, Wales and Ireland came in hundreds, bringing with them customs, dialects, superstitions and faiths foreign to the Don Valley. Gradually these foreigners from the midlands and the north have become digested by their South Yorkshire hosts. And such digestion has done something to enrich the local strain."

The Don Valley that I know is a diverse community. It is dominated by the former mining villages of Conisbrough, Denaby, Edlington, Rossington, and Hatfield—a new addition to the constituency. It is a constituency of striking landmarks, scenic villages and many beauty spots. It includes villages stretching to the borders of Nottinghamshire, such as Bawtry. The constituency has seen a rapid expansion of villages such as Auckley, Finningley and Sprotbrough, with new families and their young children moving to the area every week.

Don Valley is the historic heart of South Yorkshire, boasting two castles—Tickhill and Conisbrough, which is the setting for the classic story "Ivanhoe", penned by

Sir Walter Scott in a room in the Boat inn at Sprotbrough falls. If *The Mirror* is to be believed, "Ivanhoe" is the favourite book of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

In the book, Sir Walter Scott describes Conisbrough castle. He wrote:

"There are few more beautiful or more striking scenes in England than are presented by the vicinity of this ancient Saxon fortress. The soft and gentle River Don sweeps through an amphitheatre in which cultivation is richly blended with woodland, and on a mount ascending from the river, well defended by walls and ditches, rises this ancient edifice."

Conisbrough castle is part of Don Valley's past, but it is also part of its future. Along with the Earth centre on the site of the old Denaby main colliery, Conisbrough castle affords opportunities to attract visitors from afar and become part of Don Valley's economic regeneration.

I know that the people of Don Valley will welcome the Bill, which will pave the way to reducing class sizes. That pledge, coupled with the ambitious goal of raising education standards and opportunities for children and young people, will be received with great enthusiasm by the electors of Don Valley. Families with young people in Don Valley know that, unlike for previous generations, the mines will not provide the gateway to employment for the many. They know that education is the foundation. The achievement of their children will determine their life chances thereafter. The Bill demonstrates that the Government intend to place education at the centre of their programme—the No. 1 priority. Education is the building block for the future, and children must be at the heart of it.

During the election campaign, one French teacher asked me how she could teach French to children in year 7 of secondary school if, when they arrived, some had not yet mastered the basics of written and spoken English. That is a problem that the Conservatives refused to tackle. Standards are the cornerstone of our education policy. Schools are a vital part of any community and have a precious role to play in the life of the small villages that dominate my constituency.

However, schools are not islands, and must be encouraged to share their expertise, spread their best practice and learn from each other. Where a school is failing, we must look to turn it around in six months, not six years. That should be the Government's ambition. Not to do so is to condemn generations of children.

Gone are the days when the height of Government ambition was to have one good school in every town. That proposal was rejected at the election. We must ensure that every school is a good school; that every school comes up to scratch—nothing less is acceptable. Gone will be the complacency that allowed class sizes to rise steadily throughout the years of the Major Government. By 1996, more than 1.25 million children were in classes of 31 or more. Indeed, in my constituency, more than 2,000 children are in classes of more than 30 pupils.

I welcome the Government's intention to review the presentation of league tables, because, vital as they are, the many qualities that a school offers—leadership, morale and parental involvement—are all essential ingredients that add value to a child's education. Those qualities must be reflected in information made available to parents. The Bill makes a start. Those who choose to buy private education for their child are buying one thing above all else: smaller class sizes. Yet for the majority in Britain, the past five years have seen an unrelenting rise in class sizes. That rise must be brought to an end, and the Bill helps to release resources to begin that task.

The Bill will be welcomed by the electorate of Don Valley as a sign of a new Labour Government who govern for the many not for the few; a sign that Britain has turned a page in history and entered a new era. The Government deserve praise for the flying start that they have made, showing in weeks that a change of Government can lead to a change of mood and priorities. I hope that, for the duration of the Government's term of office, I serve my constituency well in this new era in British life—a period of new hope and great opportunities. As the Member of Parliament for Don Valley, and, perhaps more important, as the mother of three children in state education, I commend the Bill to the House.

5.5 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I congratulate the hon. Member for Don Valley (Ms Flint) on what I am sure the whole House will agree was an absolutely excellent speech. I particularly commend her comments on education and her clear and passionate commitment. I very much hope that the Secretary of State noted her comments and will ensure that she does not have to wait 37 years before she assumes a senior position and is able to do something about her commitment to education.

The hon. Member for Don Valley spent much of her speech describing why she was not going to break a number of records set by her predecessors. Judging from her confidence, humour, candour and honesty, I am sure that she will very soon be held in the same affection among her constituents as her predecessor. I am sure that we all wish her well.

There was some humour in some of the other speeches too. I agreed in particular with the former Secretary of State for Education, the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), when she bemoaned the fact that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) was no longer present in education debates. She implied that he is not very happy in his post in the Office of Public Service. I do not know whether that is so, but I can reveal that he has a very large desk—at least he told me he has. He said that it took him three and a half minutes to circumnavigate it. I am sure that we would all have liked very much to hear his thoughts on education today.

I want to make it clear that the Liberal Democrats will support the Second Reading of the Bill. In the 17 or 18 years' operation of the assisted places scheme, we have consistently made clear our opposition to it. It logically follows that we shall support a Bill proposing its abolition, and we shall do so willingly. I shall express one or two reservations about some of its details, but we shall support abolition of the scheme.

The reasons for our opposition have been repeated on numerous occasions and are very clear. We have given the same reasons year after year every time the scheme has been debated. We dislike a scheme that, as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) pointed out, is centrally administered, that takes no account of local need and that leads to enormous regional variations in the allocation of funds.

We dislike a scheme that appears to use taxpayers' money to prop up independent schools that have a high proportion of assisted places pupils when such schools

[Mr. Don Foster]

might otherwise fail. We are especially concerned about allegations that some independent schools that rely heavily on assisted places may have artificially inflated their fees, knowing that the state will meet the new, higher fees.

At no time have we been convinced that the scheme offers value for money, or that it has even met the criteria laid down by the previous Administration. For example, it is often said that the scheme offers pupils a superior education. On a number of occasions the former Secretary of State and her former ministerial colleagues told us that pupils on the assisted places scheme achieved outstanding GCSE and A-level results and that those schools made sure that that happened. That was certainly true in many cases, but not in all.

Indeed, it would hardly be surprising if those results were particularly good given the intake of those schools—they admit that under 1 per cent. of their intake require any form of special education. Excellent results are not universal, however, and in 1996 a significant number of those schools did less well than their neighbouring state schools, especially at A-level. The results achieved at some supposedly excellent schools on the assisted places scheme were mediocre.

Not long ago, the former Prime Minister visited Pangbourne college and cited it as an example of how the excellent private sector provides excellent education to the children of poor families. That college was out-performed at A-level by 25 of Berkshire's comprehensive schools as well as by several grammar schools in the area. There are many other examples of independent schools on the scheme that deliver less good A-level and GCSE results than those achieved by state schools in their areas. It is by no means universally true that the additional cost to the state of the scheme ensures a better education for all the students who participate in it.

It is equally untrue that all such participants come from so-called working class backgrounds, as was originally intended. The Secretary of State rehearsed that argument in detail. I will not repeat it other than to draw attention to the frequent references made by him to a speech by the former Conservative Member of Parliament for Buckingham, Mr. George Walden, about seven months ago. On that occasion—the Secretary of State omitted to cite it—he also said:

"Unfortunately, in practice, many of the crumbs are intercepted by the agile hands of the middle classes . . . Of course some places go to deserving children, but an awful lot do not."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. 492.]

Given my remarks so far, the House will fully understand the reasons for my party's opposition to the assisted places scheme and, therefore, our reasons for supporting the Bill.

Whenever my colleagues or I have spoken about the scheme we have always made it clear that it is the scheme that we oppose, not independent schools. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey), whom we are delighted to see has rejoined our Benches after a brief absence, said in 1988:

"It is important to stress that my party does not oppose private education".—[*Official Report*, 5 July 1988; Vol. 136, c. 1004.]

Similar comments have been made by other right hon. and hon. Friends on numerous occasions, but we have now gone further than that by calling for the replacement of the assisted places scheme with local partnership schemes drawn up between the state and independent schools. In our 1997 election manifesto we stated:

"We will phase out the Assisted Places Scheme and use the money saved to enable LEAs, if they wish, to enter into local partnership schemes. These could include assisting the funding of pupils at independent schools."

The House will be aware of the extensive current collaboration between the state and the independent sector. We want to build on that co-operation to open the enormous resource of the independent sector to the entire community, to their mutual benefit.

Our plans are intended to operate at local level with the local identification of educational needs. It is our intention that the independent sector should be used to help to meet those needs, especially when the state sector is either unable to meet them or can do so only at disproportionate cost.

My party's views are best summarised by the following quotation, which states:

"Our view is that the independent sector is not going to go away and we need to reach an accommodation which is beneficial to everyone . . . The idea that we could ever have abolished private education, in a world where we are part of the European Union, was never on. Facing up to that allows us to get on with the world as it is and to discuss with the private sector a sensible way forward and a workable relationship."

Those words are not mine, but those of the current Secretary of State in an interview with the Independent Schools Information Service—ISIS—magazine in October 1995. I agree with every single word.

Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman went further in that interview in his apparent support for the Liberal Democrat policy on the way forward for independent schools because he said:

"Primarily we would have to allow local judgments, but we would need to lay down criteria, so there was a fair basis and so that children were not unfairly discriminated against."

He went so far as to agree with us when he said that there would need to be a mechanism to sort out difficulties if, at a local level, there was hostility to the idea of placing a child at an independent school.

Given such agreement between my party and the Secretary of State, I hope that it will be possible for us to work together to develop that new approach to the replacement of the assisted places scheme. It is my sincere regret that the Bill makes no reference to the urgent need to develop that new form of partnership, but I know that the Secretary of State is keen on it.

Mr. Blunkett: I take the unusual step of intervening to point out to the hon. Gentleman, who has correctly quoted me, that what I described in that interview is perfectly feasible under the terms of the Education Act 1944. The House will be aware that, according to what were known as the Martin rules, children were aided in voluntary and private sector provision where there was no suitable provision available for them either because of their special needs or aptitude that could not be met by the local authority. That remains the case. We wish to establish sensible criteria to avoid those rules being misused by local authorities of a different persuasion from my own to trigger selection. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, this winter we will take steps to ensure that selection is not part of the process.

Mr. Foster: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. In the interview from which I quoted, he made

similar comments about the Martin rules, but he also said that a genuine review should take place to see how those rules might be used to help children so that an appropriate placement could be made according to their needs. I entirely agree with that and his subsequent intervention. He is absolutely right that we do not want to put in place a system that offers an alternative form of selection by the backdoor. It is clear that selection on academic ability or by interview has been rejected by the electorate. We will certainly commit ourselves to work with the Secretary of State to develop that new way forward.

My second concern is that we remain to be convinced that the money released by the phasing out of the assisted places scheme will be sufficient to reduce class sizes for children aged five, six and seven. We would want the Government to go still further and reduce class sizes at least to 30 for all primary school pupils; my party has placed that commitment clearly on record, with a clear explanation of how we would fund it.

We are not alone in our concern. Reference has already been made to the work done by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, which clearly disagrees with the Government and believes that there will be insufficient funding. In a previous debate, I referred to concern even on the Labour Benches. For example, the Under–Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), said to the *Western Mail* on 7 April:

"Some, if not all, of the money to fund this will come from the assisted places scheme".

He went on to say that if there was insufficient money he would have to talk to his colleagues about where the extra resources would come from.

The previous Government certainly did not accept the present Government's figures. Last year, I tabled a parliamentary question asking for an analysis of the likely cost of meeting the pledge that has been made by the present Government. The reply said:

"The Department's statisticians estimate that it would have cost between £120 million and £250 million to reduce to a maximum of 30 pupils all single-teacher classes in years 1, 2 and 3 in January 1996 . . . The estimated costs are for extra teachers only."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 1996; Vol. 284, c. *37*.]

Clearly, that estimate does not include capital costs or the likely additional costs for teacher training.

We are prepared to suspend judgment until we see the White Paper in which the Government will explain the mechanism and, one hopes, give some details on how the money is to be used, but because of our continuing concern it is my intention to table an amendment in Committee that would at least require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on the amount that has been freed as a result of the phasing out of the assisted places scheme and on how it is to be spent.

Despite those concerns, we intend to support the Bill tonight. We share the Secretary of State's vision for a new approach to education that will get rid of much of the division that has existed for far too long, created by the market forces approach of the previous Administration. Above all, we share his vision of an education system that delivers excellence, not only for the many rather than the few, but for all.

5.22 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me so early. I have a chipped rib, and I was beginning to find it a little uncomfortable; I was not sure whether to sit or stand. No matter what side of the House I sit on, I always seem to follow the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster). He made a good speech, and I listened carefully.

I am delighted to speak in support of the Bill, and I congratulate the Government on having moved so quickly to fulfil the promise made in our election manifesto. My main reason for wanting to get rid of the assisted places scheme is that it perpetuates the class system. We know that private schools are up in arms about the Bill. They tell us that they are bothered about the working-class children who will no longer attend them, but we all know that what really bothers them is losing the huge subsidy that they have been getting from the ordinary taxpayer.

The scheme did absolutely nothing for children from poor families, who were never the private schools' concern. As I mentioned in my question to the shadow Secretary of State, the proof of the schools' concern about having a mix of children from different backgrounds will be in how much of their own cash they put in to provide free places for poor children. When I say poor children, I mean especially those whose families are on benefit.

My second reason for welcoming the Bill is that it is intended to channel cash into bringing down to under 30 class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. That will certainly make a start on raising standards in our schools, and anything that raises standards for the many rather than the few must be applauded by everyone who is concerned about our children's education.

I have two reservations about the Bill. First, will the amount that will initially be saved from scrapping the assisted places scheme enable schools to employ enough extra teachers to cut class sizes to the proposed levels or to reduce class sizes overall? I ask that question with the greatest sincerity. Reducing class sizes will help teachers to improve standards, which is of course the most important thing. I am probably worrying too much, because I trust the Government to fulfil their promises, so, if insufficient funds are released from the abolition of the scheme, the necessary cash will be found from elsewhere.

My second reservation is a little more substantial. I assume that the Bill is intended to raise standards in our schools, but all my experience tells me that reducing class sizes for five to seven-year-olds to under 30 is unlikely to have a big effect on standards. It would be a welcome start, but only a small one. Much more needs to be done, as the Secretary of State will acknowledge.

Making a determined bid to get excellent schools with high standards means getting rid of crumbling buildings; providing more books and equipment; and allowing all schools to recruit more teachers. To raise standards, we must call a halt to the constant criticism of the teaching profession. The Tories criticised for 18 years, and I hope that we can learn from their failures.

The Tories used the teachers as scapegoats for their disastrous social policies, which created poverty and destitution across the land. Millions of children live in deprived communities in which many parents have been thrown on the scrap heap of long-term or repeated

[Mr. Gerry Steinberg]

unemployment. Those desperate people are abandoned by and alienated from society, and their attitudes were bound to spill over into the schools in deprived communities; it was obvious that such schools would have problems. What does the assisted places scheme do for those communities? We all know that it does very little.

It is crucial to recognise that the teachers are not to blame for those problems. Teachers are as much the victims of the cruel society created by Thatcher and 18 years of Tory misrule as are the children and their parents. The problems will be solved only when we have restored work and pride in those communities, and I recognise that that will take a long time. In the meantime, we should start putting the blame where it truly belongs and stop scapegoating teachers as the Tories did for so many years.

No one would deny that it is important to help schools that are not doing well, but it does not help to publish names and demoralise teachers even further. That was a Tory tactic, frowned upon by the Labour party, which now, unfortunately, seems to support it. I find it hard to understand why we need to do that. We should not alienate teachers; we should appreciate them and the difficult job that they do.

Mr. Don Foster: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would have been helpful if some criteria had been given to explain the justification for schools being on the list?

Mr. Steinberg: The hon. Gentleman knows my opinion: no list should have been published in the first place. That is a genuine disagreement between me and my Front-Bench colleagues, and I am sure that we will resolve it over the years. As usual, we have heard some silly statements from the previous Government. At least I am allowed to make a speech on my views; I never heard Tory Members doing that from this side of the House. They always said what they were told to say by their Whips. The Whips are not telling me what to say. I shall say exactly what I want.

The abolition of the privatised Ofsted and the sacking of the chief inspector of schools, Chris Woodhead, would be an important step to better morale and confidence among teachers and to improved standards. I have advocated it for several years, and continue to do so. This man has needlessly criticised the teaching profession, blackened the names of schools and supported Tory policies ever since he was appointed. He even fiddled the statistics for his Tory masters to try to give the Tories' criticisms some credence. That was shown clearly by the Education and Employment Select Committee in the last Parliament.

The assisted places scheme accentuated all those problems. No wonder private schools look good compared with the schools that I have described. They have plenty of resources, the children come from wealthy families and have parents who feel that they have a stake in society. Of course, many private schools do not look so good if we compare them with state schools with similar children, who have parents who can dig into their pockets to make up for some of the resources taken away by the previous Tory Government. If scrapping the scheme means that we can employ more teachers to reduce class sizes, it will be a small and welcome start to restoring justice to our education system. However, I am not totally convinced that the amounts saved will initially have much effect on reducing class sizes.

Private schools realise the importance of small class size, regardless of the age of pupils. It is crazy that it is the wrong way round in the state system: the younger the child, the bigger the class. Class sizes are irrelevant if teachers simply lecture students and cram them with information. I have seen that done in Japan to students in their late teens. Class sizes are crucial in the pre-school and primary stages of a child's development.

Mrs. Gillan *rose—*

Mr. Steinberg: I have expressed some reservations about the measure, but I assure the House that I have no reservations about getting rid of the assisted places scheme. It is a state subsidy to schools that caters for people who are rich enough to pay for private education, if they are foolish enough to want to do so. We will not be able to achieve the classless society that we all talk about until we get rid of private schools altogether.

Mrs. Gillan *rose—*

Mr. Steinberg: Private schools perpetuate class distinction, which the scheme intensifies by robbing state education of vital resources. For 18 years, the Tories brought gimmick after gimmick into education without ever taking constructive steps to improve standards. The assisted places scheme was one such gimmick. It was meant to con the public into believing that it would help working-class children to receive a private education.

Mrs. Gillan: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman will not give way, but he has made a serious allegation against Mr. Chris Woodhead. I challenge him to produce proof of his statement and invite him to repeat it outside the Chamber. Can you advise me whether we can ask him to do that, especially as Mr. Woodhead has been employed by the incumbent Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): As the hon. Lady knows, that is not a matter for the Chair. It is not a point of order.

Mr. Steen: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a matter for the Chair when the hon. Gentleman's speech departs so far from the subject of the debate. He should be pulled up and restricted to the Bill's Second Reading. He is straying over the whole of education policy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is for me to decide. The hon. Gentleman has been as good as gold.

Mr. Steinberg: I apologise to the hon. Lady the shadow Under-Secretary of State, or whatever her present title is. I did not see her trying to intervene, or I should have given way. She has only to read the Select Committee report of its meeting with Mr. Woodhead in the last Parliament. I would have assumed that, as a Minister, she would have read the report. Obviously, she did not, which is very naughty of her.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman said that Mr. Woodhead fiddled the statistics. I would like him to

bring proof of Mr. Woodhead's deception and I invite him to repeat his remarks outside the Chamber, where he is not covered by privilege.

Mr. Steinberg: As I have already said, if the hon. Lady would listen, that statement was made in the Select Committee, when Mr. Woodhead was personally able to answer the criticisms of him that I and others made. Read my lips: read the report. It is a pity that you did not read it when you were in government; you would not have made as many damn mistakes as you did over the past 18 years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is out of order. I have never been in government.

Mr. Steinberg: This is not the first time that I have spoken in the House about the assisted places scheme. On the previous occasion, I spoke against an increase in its funding, knowing full well that I was wasting my time. I am delighted that this time I can speak in support of its abolition, knowing full well that we will win the vote this evening. The old adage rings very sweet: he who laughs last, laughs loudest.

I make no apology for referring to my speech on 13 July 1993. I was shouted down that night by Tory Back Benchers, just as they have tried to do in the past few minutes. The last time that they shouted me down, they had been drinking in the bar. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) has been there. I pointed out then that it was a disgrace that, when most state schools were struggling to find enough resources to pay for teachers, equipment and essential repairs and when there was a lack of nursery places, the Government continued to subsidise private education from public funds.

When the scheme was brought in by the then Education Minister, Rhodes Boyson, he said that it was intended for able children from the poorest homes. He may have been sincere in his intentions but he was proved wrong. The scheme is, and was, exploited by the middle class. A MORI poll in 1996 commissioned by ISIS, the Independent Schools Information Service, showed that only 30 per cent. of assisted places scheme pupils came from working-class backgrounds.

Only two out of five households receiving assistance had incomes below £9,874 and so received the full remission. In other words, almost 55 per cent. of children using the scheme have parents who are lawyers, civil servants, teachers, clergymen or other white-collar workers. As few as 10 per cent. of children on the scheme have fathers who are manual workers. The proportion of professional and managerial families receiving financial support has increased by 8 per cent. since 1991.

In July 1993, I gave examples of the subsidies offered to parents who wished to send their children to Durham school, the prestigious public school in my constituency. I have updated figures that show the iniquity of the scheme. In 1995-96, the average fee charged at Durham school was about £6,220 per year. A family earning £25,000 a year with one child on the assisted places scheme attending that school would have received a subsidy of £2,350; with two children, the subsidy would have been £5,670. I suspect that that subsidy would have been bigger than its tax bill for the year. If a family earning £19,000 had sent one child to the school, it would have received a subsidy of £4,330, or £9,000 if it had sent two children. All those sums come directly from the public purse.

It is a scandal that, this year, £140 million will be spent on the assisted places scheme in England. By comparison, the Tory Government intended to spend only £253 million on school building grant to the main sector. The Tories planned to spend more than half what they planned to spend on all the school buildings in England on a small number of students in the private sector. That is wrong and immoral.

As I said in July 1993, the scheme does not even offer value for money. The average cost of an assisted place in England is estimated at about £4,000. The education standing spending assessment for secondary and post-16 education in the 1996-97 financial year was equivalent to £2,800 per pupil. In other words, it costs the taxpayer over £1,000 more to educate a pupil in a private school instead of a state school and there is absolutely no evidence that the children in private schools do any better than they would have done in a state school.

After my speech in 1993, I was criticised by the then Under-Secretary of State for Schools, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), for making

"a rather pathetic parade of class-ridden prejudice".—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 948.]

In anticipation of similar criticism, I say to Opposition Members that, if that means that I defend and speak for the rights of the majority of ordinary people against the privileges of and state pillaging by the private sector, I am delighted to accept that analysis. I suspect that my feeling was shared by the vast majority of the electorate when they expressed their views on 1 May. The Tories arrogantly continue not to listen.

I conclude as I did in my 1993 speech, by saying:

"the scheme produces no better results from the pupils who participate in it".—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1993; Vol. 228, c. 944.]

It was never spelled out to the House or to the public that the scheme would predominantly assist pupils from middle-class backgrounds, so I can only conclude that it was a device used by the Tories to meet the increase in private school fees and tackle the financial problems faced by those schools. It is a subsidy to the private sector from the state purse, it is grossly immoral, and I fully support the abolition of the scheme.

5.40 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am grateful to you for calling me to address the House for the first time during this important debate on education policy. I apologise to the House—the class of 1997 is a particularly large one and I fear that there will be several other maiden speeches made during the debate.

There can be no more important issue than education for it is vital to the future of our country and to the future of all our children. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House are united in their desire to see the best education provided for our children, even though we differ passionately on how best that can be achieved.

I understand that it is customary in a maiden speech to acknowledge the service given by one's predecessor and as the first Member of Parliament for the new

[Mr. Graham Brady]

constituency of Altrincham and Sale, West constituency, I am privileged to be able to pay tribute to two distinguished parliamentarians. Sir Fergus Montgomery represented Altrincham and Sale in its various configurations from October 1974, during which time he was a diligent constituency Member of Parliament and a popular member of the House, which he served with distinction, most recently as Chairman of the Committee of Selection. I know that some of Fergus's fondest memories, however, were of the time that he spent as parliamentary private secretary to Lady Thatcher. I understand that the right hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has now applied for that vacancy.

I am sure that I am not the only new Member who has been advised to prepare for his maiden speech by reading those of his predecessors. There can be few who have been so badly served by that advice as I. When I went to the Library and obtained Fergus's maiden speech, I discovered that he had spoken about Newcastle, East, for which constituency he was first elected to the House in 1959. In desperation I turned to his predecessor, Tony Barber, but he entered the House in 1951 as the hon. Member for Doncaster. I count myself fortunate indeed to begin my Parliamentary career as the Member for my home constituency of Altrincham and Sale.

The heart of my constituency is the historic market town of Altrincham, which contains the old market place where Bonny Prince Charlie stopped on his journey south. The charter establishing the market was granted 700 years ago. With so many hon. Ladies in the House, I hesitate to mention Arnold's yard, which is reputed to be the site where a woman was last sold at public auction in this country. Just two minutes' walk from my front door is the site of the old slum of Chapel street, which sent so many of its young men to fight for our country, our freedom and our democracy in the great war that George V described it as the

"bravest little street in England".

I am proud to represent Altrincham and Sale, West, not only because of its history, but because of its present quality as an attractive place to live and work, its combination of modern businesses, fine shopping, excellent schools and efficient small farms.

From 1983 until this year, the Sale, West part of my constituency was fortunate to be served by another fine parliamentarian—Winston Churchill. Like him, I enter Parliament as the youngest Conservative Member. Unlike him, I am the first and not the fifth generation of my family to enter Parliament, and my presence here, like that of many Members of this Parliament, bears testament to the more open, meritocratic society that we have built in recent decades. I believe that the greater opportunities in today's Britain have been put in place principally by Conservative administrations and there can be no greater proof of that than in the field of education.

We are all in part the product of the environment in which we begin our lives, however privileged or impoverished that may be. Perhaps the most important function of state education should be to free us all from the social or material constraints of our birth—to free us all to achieve our full potential. Like many in this House—and like three of our last four Prime Ministers—I was fortunate enough to enjoy a grammar school education. In the borough of Trafford, successive Conservative administrations have worked, not only to preserve our excellent grammar schools, but to raise standards in the high schools as well. What we have a achieved is an example of selective education that works and it should be taken as a model for improving education across the country.

I believe passionately in the role of the grammar schools as the greatest of social levellers and I fear that before long I will be called upon to defend my old school, Altrincham boys grammar school, from those who would see the remaining 160 grammar schools destroyed. As a believer in grammar schools, I have always thought that the goal of state education should be to achieve such high standards that parents would not wish to send their children to private schools. Sadly, we are very far away from achieving such high standards in many parts of the country, especially in our inner cities. That is where the assisted places scheme plays such a vital role.

In my own city of Manchester, independent schools such as those already mentioned by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman)—Manchester Grammar, William Hulme's, Withington and Manchester High—are providing a top-quality education to local children who are dependent on assisted places. These are children from Moss Side and Hulme—boys and girls from poor families who have few opportunities in life.

In an attempt to justify its attack on the scheme, the Government have claimed that assisted places are just a subsidy for middle-class parents who can afford to pay school fees themselves. Nothing could be further from the truth. The 300 boys on assisted-places at Manchester Grammar are part of a 500-year-old tradition of providing top-quality education, regardless of social or economic standing. Of the 242 pupils with assisted places at William Hulme's, 160 have their full fees paid, which means that they have combined parental income of less than £10,000 a year.

The assisted places scheme is not a middle class subsidy—it is a ladder of opportunity for the poorest families. By abolishing this scheme, the Government will take opportunities from those who have little else. It is wrong to take away the assisted places scheme without putting something of value in its place. In many inner-city areas—it must be said that they often have Labour local education authorities—there are few good state schools to provide for children who lose their assisted places. Many independent schools will work hard to continue to provide places free of charge to talented children whose parents could not afford to pay fees, but the sums involved may be great and such schools often have little money in reserve.

The Government say that their objective is to raise sufficient funds through the abolition of the scheme to reduce class sizes in primary schools, but it looks increasingly unlikely that that objective can be achieved without building new classrooms to accommodate further classes. Even if smaller classes can be achieved, that will not provide better primary and secondary schools in the centre of Manchester to replace what will be taken away.

The Government's claim that they will govern for the whole nation is very fine rhetoric, but like many Labour policies, the abolition of the assisted places scheme will harm the very people it is intended to help. The wealthy will be unaffected, but the poor will lose out. The social mix in many schools will be lost and the result will be

more social division, not less. Labour Governments have always pursued an education policy based on levelling down and not levelling up. They have always believed that standards can be raised for the many by removing excellence wherever they find it. They have always been wrong and their mistakes have cost our children dearly. I urge the Government to accept that they are wrong today and to abandon their assault on the assisted places scheme.

5.50 pm

Mr. Michael John Foster (Worcester): I congratulate the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on his maiden speech. I, too, am making a maiden speech, and I know what a daunting task it is. I must say at the outset, however, that I do not share some of the hon. Gentleman's views on education, especially those on grammar schools and assisted places.

I also have taken advice and read widely about the content of my maiden speech. I am, of course, mindful of the advice that Madam Speaker, gave following her election, to keep contributions in the Chamber as brief as possible.

It gives me immense pleasure to tell the House of the infinite variety that Worcester, as a city, offers, from its magnificent cathedral to its lively night life. The city can be enjoyed by all.

Worcester has a successful range of industry, from Royal Worcester porcelain to high-tech manufacturing companies such as Mazak of Europe. The city has also a variety of education establishments. For example, it contains four fee-paying secondary schools that benefit from the assisted places scheme. They benefited last year to the tune of over £2 million. At the same time, 1,847 five, six and seven-year-olds in Worcester were in class sizes of more than 30. Clearly that is wrong. I and thousands of other fellow parents whose children are in the state sector are overjoyed at the prospect of seeing the Bill progress through the House.

Schools in my constituency have historically been poorly funded. That is the somewhat sad inheritance of the previous Conservative-controlled county council. That administration may have been satisfied with average results achieved by poorly funded schools, but I am not. We, Labour, are in favour of good results—indeed, the highest level of results possible. I want Worcester and Worcester pupils to achieve the best.

I have a great interest in sport, and Worcester can be proud of its sporting traditions. The city boasts a very successful rugby club and an ambitious soccer club. It is home to the county that plays on unarguably the most attractive cricket ground in the country. It must be said that we were the first this summer to show that the Australians can be beaten.

Politically, Worcester contains a high proportion of Members. I pay a special tribute to my far-sighted predecessor, the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff). The hon. Gentleman kindly decided to contest a more rural seat than stay within the city. Had he stayed, the result would have been closer than it turned out to be—that is a credit to his work within the constituency—but the outcome would still have been the same.

I understand that the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire, as a constituent of mine, was not alone in taking such action. The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) is a resident of Worcester. He showed his potential leadership qualities. Conservative Members may be interested to know that the right hon. Gentleman, as a leadership contender within the Conservative party, had the foresight to see that Loughborough, which he previously represented, would change hands in the general election. The right hon. Gentleman decided to move to Charnwood instead.

I can honestly say that the new hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire has been most kind and helpful to me since my election to this place. He has offered welcome advice and has even kept some unfinished case work for me.

The 1997 general election will be remembered in Worcester for different but remarkable things. First, there was the appearance of the Conservative party's femme fatale, a lady who held the key to its success or otherwise. I am talking about Worcester woman. It was *The Sunday Times* which first revealed her. Stripped down to her bare essentials, she is married to a skilled manual worker and there is a joint income of £18,000. She has children and buys computer games for them. She and her family have holidays in Florida.

I have it from a well-placed source—not to be confused with a Worcestershire sauce—that any west midlands woman would have done for Conservative central office. I understand that Worcester was its second choice. Luckily for Worcester and, I suspect, for Conservative central office, it rejected West Bromwich wench.

I said that Worcester was lucky to be chosen for such an attack because Worcester woman attracted the world's media. Attention was focused on Worcester during the general election campaign. I can boast of giving interviews about Worcester woman to a Dutch newspaper, Danish television, Canadian television, Irish radio, German television, three United States newspapers and even the *Yorkshire Post*.

The second important event surrounding the general election was historically significant. In 1945, Labour failed to win Worcester by only four votes. Indeed, it had never won the parliamentary seat of Worcester. However, as a result of the efforts of my local party, however, and because of the inspired leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, Worcester has a Labour Member for the first time in history. To mark the event, I publicly invite my right hon. Friend to make one of his first visits in his new office to Worcester, where he can be assured of a warm welcome from this, his faithful city.

5.54 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Last year, 1,011 children in Devon were partly funded to go to independent schools. With the passing of the Bill, I want to ask the Secretary of State where those children will go. We know that 42 per cent. of children with assisted places are from poor families. I mean not families of former Lloyd's underwriters but single-parent mums with incomes of less than £10,000 a year. Not all poor children who receive assisted places are from middle-class families, as the Secretary of State wrongly suggested.

The factor that assisted places children have in common is that they are gifted. As I am married to a child and educational psychologist, I am aware of the importance of giving gifted children special help.

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

If the Conservative Government had tried to introduce the Bill three months ago, a Labour Member standing on the very spot from which I am speaking would have rightly criticised them on the basis that the Bill would have been attacking the less privileged. Here is the Conservative party on the Opposition Benches—a one-nation party which does not favour the rich against the poor—a party which wants equal opportunities for everyone based on merit, and here is a Conservative Member criticising the Labour Government for attacking the less privileged. It is, indeed, an irony—a paradox.

The evidence in favour of the assisted places scheme shows that assisted places pupils outperform their peers in the state sector and those in independent schools. The Government will not improve standards and opportunities for state school pupils by denying children from less privileged backgrounds the opportunity of an independent education.

In my new constituency of Totnes, there are splendid secondary schools. In Totnes itself, the governors of KEVICS, a former grammar school, made a direct appeal to the Secretary of State in 1989 to limit the school's intake to 240 children a year. There is no more space for any more children. There are limits in Kingsbridge, Dartmouth, Brixham and Churston. All those schools are full. Indeed, they all have waiting lists.

There are additional problems. There is constant pressure in south Devon for more homes. It is one of the fastest growing areas in the west country. The structure plan for Devon requires 90,000 more homes to be built by the year 2011. Some of those homes will be allocated to the existing population, but about one third of those 90,000 houses will go to new families who will be brought in to fill jobs within the new industry that is being built.

Perhaps the Secretary of State will explain where the children living in the 90,000 newly built homes will go to school. Already there are no available places in my secondary schools. If we add the extra 1,011 children who will no longer be able to take up assisted places, there will be a crisis of education in south Devon, created entirely by the Labour party.

There is a direct correlation between the number of new factories and businesses, units built and the pressures on housing requirements from those who take up jobs in the area.

A few years ago, the Government gave £25 million to Nortel—the former STC factory—to develop new technology. The staff who filled the new jobs created came from all over the country with their families and children. The increasing pressure on housing demands has a spin-off on school demands, and already the schools say that they cannot accommodate the children of these new families. Therefore, extra money is needed from the Government for new buildings and for more land, because the secondary schools have no more space as they are.

The money raised by the abolition of the assisted places scheme will not go to secondary schools at all. It will go to primary schools. So perhaps the Secretary of State will explain, when he winds up, where we are to find the new money.

The abolition of the scheme will not only limit the prospects of many children from underprivileged homes—and many of my constituents who are single mothers will face the added problem of where to send their children to school—but demand a vast injection of funds from the public sector for more buildings, at primary and secondary level, and more land. The sting in the tail is that the Bill may also cause many independent schools to get into financial difficulty, since 37,600 children will be taken out of that system.

I oppose the Bill on behalf of my constituents because it is their children who will suffer badly. I represent a constituency with one of the largest number of single-parent families in this country, and they are up in arms at the first attempt of the Labour Government to prevent their children from having choice in education.

6.1 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East): It is a great pleasure for me to return to the House to represent the people of Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East.

As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted by certain events in 1992, I profoundly believe that the real test of a Government is the educational system and ethos that they leave as their legacy to future generations. I shall expand on that theme, on the core of Labour's policy as it affects my own constituency, and on how the Bill, which I greatly welcome, will benefit my constituents and their children.

Past Education Ministers—Rab Butler and Ellen Wilkinson, as well as Tony Crosland and Shirley Williams—were keen to see that what was good for the child or the school was also good for the nation and for the future of our nation as a whole. That consensus was shattered in 1979, and nowhere was the callous wrecking of this nation's social fabric that took place during the long, dark nights of the past 18 years more ferocious than in the classrooms, schools and colleges throughout the land.

Education became a plaything of ideology and the prime reason for the introduction of the assisted places scheme. We saw the supposed freeing of choice, which did nothing more or less than allow class prejudices to determine school structures and values. We saw bureaucracy burgeon, setting local education authority against local education authority, school against school, and teacher against teacher. We saw the teaching profession vilified as the enemy within, and we saw the fatal result of that process in the educational attainment of our children. Nearly half of all 11-year-olds in our schools failed to reach expected standards in English and maths, while we still had fewer 17 and 18-year-olds in continuing full-time education than any other comparable industrialised nation in the world.

In my own area of Teesside, the story is the same. I represent a constituency in an area which, during the last 18 years, became a test bed for Thatcherite social policies: the decimation of our core industries, a high and rising level of unemployment, with the social exclusion and poverty that accompanied it, and the setting up of a quango Government. There were initiatives to keep, somehow, a state finger in this dyke of human despair: a city technology college, a Cleveland action team, an urban development corporation and the effective privatisation of further education and the careers service.

What was the result? In 1992, the percentage of local children gaining five or more GCSEs between grades A and C was 29.8 per cent., against a national average of

38.1 per cent. In 1995, attainment levels had risen; locally to 33.9 per cent., but the national figures had risen to 44.5 per cent. Our children had to compete on an escalator that was running faster and faster. As the local TEC put it:

"Teesside remains behind the national average in attainment of GCSE's . . . and . . . falling behind on its 1994 figures".

Why? Our schools are no worse or no better in terms of teacher excellence than anywhere else in the UK. As a former member of Middlesbrough council's education committee, I know and admire the dedication of our teaching staff. They enjoy professional back-up from local education authorities and are dedicated to excellence. They work in an educational tradition that has always valued lifelong learning. They come from an educational tradition that valued the ability to thrive at an early age. The former Cleveland county council and its education department were the first in the UK to provide 100 per cent. nursery provision.

The answer is simple, short and stark. Class differences still haunt our classrooms. The social experiment of the Thatcher and Major years have not brought about social liberation and greater inter-class mobility, but have merely served to increase existing divisions and magnify them to such a degree that, like the walking wounded of the Somme, the human casualties will be with us for many years to come.

The Bill marks the start in bringing about a healing process and, for that reason alone, I believe that it should have the support of the whole House. The fact that it is being opposed by the Tories demonstrates to me starkly and clearly that they are opposed to fairness and equality. They have shown their true nature: they are the party of the few, arguing for the few.

In contrast, our Bill shows that we are the party of the many, arguing for the people of this country as a whole and not merely for the privileged few. The phasing out of the assisted places scheme, which was all but invisible on Teesside, and which was nothing more or less than a financial blood transfusion for many already wealthy independent schools, will provide us with the cash to bring down our infant class sizes to below 30, certainly for schools in my constituency, such as St. Thomas More and Marton Manor primary. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister visited Marton Manor primary school. He received a very warm welcome from all the pupils and staff, and is welcome to come again.

Reducing class sizes is an essential first step to structuring early years education so that children can see education as an enjoyable process, which binds them more closely and personally to their teachers. Primary schools and those children entering primary and infant schools at key stage one are the foundations of an effective lifelong learning experience. At that stage, children are introduced to the elements of learning that will remain with them throughout their life: the structures of mathematics, a knowledge of language and the ability to express their feelings, emotions, wants and desires, the knowledge of how to acquire, master and pass on information, the beauty of the written word and the aesthetics of logic, shape and structure.

Above all, primary schools help children to discover themselves, to identify their strengths, which will be reflected later in life in the shape of self-esteem, capability and confidence—strengths which will shape our future destiny. If those abilities are lost or badly imparted, or if the penny-pinching of the past 18 years has led to a shortage of human or capital resources, the damage will be immediate, and will impair both the individual and the society of which that individual is part, possibly for the next 60 or 70 years. The Bill is the first step towards ensuring that such impairment will not be a feature of the Britain that Labour intends to build.

As I said, many schools in my constituency will benefit from the move. A number of them, with class sizes of more than 30, are in rapidly growing areas. They are schools that were planned in the 1970s, but have been fighting to keep abreast of rising numbers of children. Other schools are in poorer areas, where larger class sizes are accompanied by an inherited lack of capital investment in buildings and equipment.

There are particular problems in one part of the borough of Redcar and Cleveland, which is covered by my constituency. Although class sizes in the borough as a whole conform to the national average, it contains eight primary schools with an average roll of 30 per class and seven with an average above that. In 1998, thanks to a Labour Government, that dismal picture will be eradicated. The future will produce effective schools, which will play a key part in the life of our community and ensure that everyone has a stake in a school, in the neighbourhood and in the success and confidence of its children.

In particular, parents will be seen not as passive onlookers, but as key partners in the process of ensuring that schools deliver a motivated curriculum and the level of attainment that parents see as proper and fit for their children.

It is now time for our local education authorities, heads and other teachers, governors and parents to take the initiative—to respond to this fresh new approach, and to build locally on the new foundations. The ball is in their court and I know that they will seize the opportunity with both hands. At the same time, however, the Government must recognise—as I believe they do—that there is a far broader perspective in the need to build a fair society. Such a society will acknowledge ability, regardless of class or background.

That must be central to the ethos of our schools. It will acknowledge that extra efforts and resources must be deployed to allow areas that are scarred by poverty and unemployment to fight back and succeed. That must be reflected in the distribution of education resources. Such a society will also recognise that, although the process will take time, the healing of social wounds must be our overriding obligation in our contract with the British people, and that that healing will take root in the classroom first.

Many of the measures on which we shall vote later will not be as effective as we want them to be. In 1942, Beveridge identified the giants that had to be conquered if we were to build a new, confident society. Fifty-five years on, there are still giants out there in the dark woods. The greatest is still inequality—and inequality in education is still the biggest scar that our society must bear.

I do not want to see children suffer in my constituency or, indeed, in any constituency. I do not want them to find at the age of five that their hopes and their destiny have been smashed because the will and the resources for them to succeed are not there. We still have a task to perform

[Dr. Ashok Kumar]

and giants to slay. I know that that will be the central task of the new Government, and that our lasting inheritance—our children—will still be invigorating and refreshing our society half a century on. It is the future that we should all have at the forefront of our minds as we go through the Lobbies tonight. The Bill demonstrates to me that education has become the key element of Government policy, and it has my warmest support.

6.14 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this important debate.

When I was preparing my speech, I looked at some of the maiden speeches that had been made by hon. Members in the weeks before the Whitsun recess. I noted that the hon. Member for Cumbernauld and Kilsyth (Ms McKenna) mentioned an incident in which a taxi driver had mistaken her for the wife of an Labour Member of Parliament. Sadly, mistaken identity is not confined to the Labour Benches.

My own confusion was great when I was in the Members Lobby and the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) rushed up to me, himself in a state of some confusion, and encouraged me to put my name on the list for the ballot for private Members' Bills. He was astounded when I looked at him and said, "Why?" Obviously, he had mistaken me for one of the ladies on the other side. [HON. MEMBERS: "Surely not."] I was told that a Member making a maiden speech was never intervened on or heckled. That clearly refers to the opposite party, but not to one's own.

Further confusion has ensued in my early days in the House. When I arrived, I had to take great pains to point out to my colleagues that I represented Maidenhead rather than Maidstone. That was particularly pertinent in the early days of this Parliament. Being a Conservative Member called Theresa adds a certain interest to my life in the House; I am thinking of acquiring a badge reading, "No, I am the other one." To cap it all, on the morning when I moved into my new office, when the telephone rang for the first time I eagerly picked up the receiver to find out who the caller could be, only to discover that the person on the other end of the line wanted to speak to Edwina Currie.

One of the pleasures of making a maiden speech—I suspect that it may be the only pleasure—is the opportunity that it gives the new Member to pay tribute to his or her predecessors. For most Members, that means referring to former Members of Parliament; but Maidenhead is a new constituency, created from two former constituencies, and I am pleased to say that both my predecessors—my hon. Friend the Member for Windsor (Mr. Trend) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood)—are well and truly back in the House.

I thank them for the kindness that they have shown me, and for the help and advice that they have given and continue to give me. I particularly thank them for giving up some rather good bits of their former constituencies to form mine. In the circumstances, I am very grateful for that. I also pay tribute to their diligence as constituency Members. Despite having had other onerous and time-consuming responsibilities at various times, both worked assiduously on behalf of their constituencies and their constituents, and in that respect they have left me with a great deal to live up to.

It is a privilege to stand here as Member of Parliament for Maidenhead, especially because this is the first time that Maidenhead has had its own Member of Parliament. In view of the potential origin of the town's name in the symbol of the maiden's head, it is perhaps appropriate that it should now be represented by a maiden—although I must confess to using the term somewhat loosely.

Although the name of the constituency is Maidenhead, it covers more than just the town of Maidenhead. It also includes some lovely tracts of Berkshire countryside, including what I would describe as some of the prettiest and most delightful villages in the country. Maidenhead is a thriving, dynamic town with a thriving local economy and many local businesses, ranging from small family firms that have been in the area for many years—indeed, for generations—to the European headquarters of multinational companies.

The advantages for businesses in the area are many. Not only is it a pleasant and attractive place in which to live and work, but there is a high-quality labour force on which to draw. Maidenhead also has the advantage of proximity to the motorway network, to London and, of course, Heathrow. Those are advantages for business, although it must be said that they also create some problems for local people—night flights into Heathrow, noise from the A404(M), the need for another bridge across the River Thames, the threat of motorway service stations and the threat of development. I have been and will continue to be involved in all those issues, and I trust that they can be resolved in the interests of those living in the constituency.

Although not much has been written about Maidenhead, it is a town steeped in history. I was reminded of that yesterday morning as I watched the mayor unveil a plaque in the town centre to commemorate the site of the 13th-century chapel that was the predecessor of the current borough church of St. Andrew and St. Mary Magdalene.

Maidenhead owes its origins to the River Thames, and the river continues to play a significant role in the life of the constituency. Many people enjoy walking alongside the river in Maidenhead and watching the operation of Boulters lock. Further up the river is the delightful village of Cookham, where people can spend time looking at the works of the local artist Stanley Spencer in the Stanley Spencer gallery.

The river in the Maidenhead constituency makes it host to one of this country's major national summer sporting events, the Henley regatta. Although Henley is in Oxfordshire, the regatta meadows are firmly in Berkshire. The river adds charm to many other villages, including Sonning and Wargrave. Wargrave may be of particular interest to female Members, because in 1914 Wargrave parish church was burnt down by suffragettes. I am happy to say that getting votes for women in Wargrave these days does not require such drastic measures. I shall not name all the villages in the constituency, but it is a delightful part of the country, and I am very proud to represent it.

Maidenhead is blessed with good schools in both the state sector and the private sector. I hope that we all agree that the aim is to provide the right education for every

child. For some children, that will be an education that is firmly based in learning practical and vocational skills. For others, it will be an education based on academic excellence. The assisted places scheme enables bright children from less well-off families to take advantage of an education that would otherwise not be available to them. I totally refute the concept that underpins the Bill—that, if everybody cannot have it, nobody should have it.

The advantage of the assisted places scheme is that it enables children from less privileged families to benefit from high-quality education. I want to focus on one aspect of the scheme, to which I trust the Government will pay some sympathetic attention. The assisted places scheme not only helps bright children, but is an important way of helping children from difficult family backgrounds or with particular social needs.

A number of charitable foundations provide boarding school places for children whose family circumstances are such that they require to go boarding school: they may have troubled backgrounds or there may be a social need. Those places are provided through a mixture of funding: the boarding school element is funded by the charitable foundation and the education costs are covered by the assisted places scheme. Those children are genuinely in need, and if the assisted places scheme goes, the opportunity to provide boarding school places for children from difficult backgrounds will go with it. I know that the Minister has received representations on that issue, and I trust that the Government will find a way to ensure that genuinely needy children continue to be catered for as they have been in the past.

I should also like to comment on the opposite side of the Bill, if I can call it that: I am referring to the reduction of class sizes. When I was the chairman of a local education authority, we had many interesting debates about the impact of class size on the quality of education. My concern about the Bill and the way in which it will operate is not only that it will abolish the assisted places scheme, but that the assumption behind it is that the prime determinant of the quality of education for our children is the size of class in which they are taught. It is not: the prime determinant of education quality is the quality of teaching, and that is a function of the quality of teachers and the way in which they teach.

The evidence clearly shows a direct correlation between the method of teaching children and the quality of education that they receive. There is no clear correlation between quality of education and class size or the amount of money spent on children in any particular class. I urge the Government to reconsider the issue of quality and standards of education. It is important to examine the methods used by teachers, particularly in the primary sector. I have long questioned the concept of child-centred education. That may sound wonderful, but, as the Office for Standards in Education has said, we should seek more whole-class teaching in primary schools. The method of teaching is important, and the Government should not forget that in their attempt to grab the headlines on the issue of class sizes.

The only other point that I want to make relates to parental choice. By putting an artificial cap on the size of primary school classes, the Government are reducing parental choice. When I was a chairman of education, I received a number of telephone calls from anguished parents who were concerned because their children could not get into the school of their choice. I am sure that any councillor involved in education will have received such calls.

Those parents will now find that their choice is further restricted, because in the past they were able to take their case to appeals panels—my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) raised that issue. We all know that head teachers often found one or two extra places for children whose need to be in a particular school was great. The Government are to abandon that practice. They say, "No, it doesn't matter if a school is popular, or that it is over-subscribed and parents are keen to get their children there. The parents don't know best about where their children should be educated. The Government know best, and the Government will put an artificial limit on class size." That will further reduce parental choice.

The Bill will not improve academic excellence or the quality of education in our classrooms. It will take away opportunities from a large number of children, who would benefit from a quality of education that they would not receive without the assisted places scheme. Furthermore, it will reduce parental choice. The Government are saying to parents, "You don't know best—we do."

6.26 pm

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): I commend the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on an excellently delivered maiden speech. I also pay a belated tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster). Their speeches were indicative of the major contributions that they will make to the work of the House.

I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech in such an important debate. I do so in the knowledge that I am the first Labour Member of Parliament for Tynemouth to make a maiden speech for more than 50 years. Indeed, it is more than 20 years since the previous Member for Tynemouth made his maiden speech. It seems that there is a tradition that the people of Tynemouth do not change their Member of Parliament very often, and I am keen to continue that tradition.

My predecessor was Neville Trotter. He served his party and his constituents well for 23 years. Almost every invitation that I receive to a constituency event ends with the words, "Mr. Trotter always supported us, and we hope you will, too." That is clear evidence that Mr. Trotter was regarded as a good constituency Member of Parliament.

Neville Trotter was influential in helping to push through legislation on solvent abuse, so many parents and young people have a lot to thank him for. However, I think that he would agree that his later years as a Member were overshadowed by the previous Government's decision to see Swan Hunter shipbuilders close. That decision came to symbolise the Conservatives' uncaring attitude towards the north-east, and the Conservative Government's standing suffered as a result.

Neville Trotter wisely decided to stand down before his party was virtually wiped out in the north-east. When the history books are written, they may well show that the Conservative Government let down not only the Swan Hunter workers, but Neville Trotter.

The Tynemouth people want to look to the future, not to the past. Tynemouth is a predominantly coastal constituency made up of the townships of Whitley Bay and North Shields, the villages of Monkseaton and Cullercoats, and Tynemouth itself.

[Mr. Alan Campbell]

I was delighted to hear that tourism is once again booming in Whitley Bay. I can thoroughly recommend it to hon. Members as a holiday destination or for a weekend break. Opposition Members may benefit by getting away from it all and walking along Tynemouth's golden beaches. That will enable them to escape from the Tea Room and the heat and trauma of the forthcoming Conservative leadership election.

It has been said that Britain is an island surrounded by fish and built on coal. If that is true, Tynemouth is quintessentially British. Unfortunately, the coal has gone and there are fewer fish and fewer North Shields fishing boats. Fishing and coal mining may have been the country's most dangerous jobs, but as they declined, Tynemouth and Tyneside faced hard times. I am pleased to say that Tyneside—where, it has been claimed, the first industrial revolution began—is on the verge of a new industrial revolution.

The decision by Siemens to locate its £1 billion microchip plant in Tynemouth will bring thousands of much needed jobs. The decision was a massive vote of confidence in local people, and I am pleased to see that 70 per cent. of the work force were recruited locally. The decision by Siemens was an acknowledgement of Britain's key role in Europe. We meddle with that at our peril. The plant was officially opened 10 days ago. It is clear that if we are to be at the cutting edge of new technology, we must equip our work force with the skills they need. Technology and markets may change, but people are a constant factor and education is the best economic investment that we can make.

Raising standards is the key to a successful future. Earlier Governments may have accepted 42nd place in the international education league and may have allowed half our 11-year-olds to fail to reach acceptable standards of literacy. This Government must not, and perhaps the best start that we can make is to bring down class sizes. I agree with the hon. Member for Maidenhead that raising standards is about the quality of teaching. However, it is also about giving our teachers time to work with individual pupils. That is why we must reduce class sizes.

I should like to declare an interest. As the parent of two children under the age of five, I am not prepared to tolerate classes of more than 30, yet one in three of our primary school children nationally are in classes of more than 30. The figure is the same in Tynemouth. If I am not prepared to see my children in over-sized classes, I cannot sit back and allow it to happen to other people's children. I can understand why some parents look to the assisted places scheme as a way out of big classes, but we cannot justify a system that subsidises a privileged few while the many are denied a proper start. That is why I welcome an early start to the process of reducing class sizes. I also welcome the end of the nursery voucher scheme and moves towards fairer funding. All those measures will help children in Tynemouth.

I have another personal reason for wanting to see the Government move quickly to honour their pledges. In his maiden speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington, East (Mr. Kemp) spoke movingly about a young man who was unable to read and write, but who had the courage to ask for help on 1 May to fill in his ballot paper. I have another example of election day courage in my constituency. An elderly man in Rake Lane hospital in North Shields was so seriously ill that his doctors refused to let him out to vote. On the evening of 1 May, he took a taxi to the polling station. He said that he had voted Labour all his life and did not intend to miss this time. That typifies the determination to see new Labour elected, not just to govern but to make the changes for the better that we have promised. By supporting the Bill, that is exactly what we shall do.

6.34 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute to the debate. I rise with some trepidation to make my maiden speech, and I shall make it with due humility in view of the breadth of experience in all parts of the House.

Perhaps I may share with hon. Members a bright idea that came to nothing. I intended to speak on the Bill because I have a particular interest in education. In preparing my speech, I decided to go to the Library to dig out the maiden speeches of two of the most notable Secretaries of State for Education since the war—Rab Butler and Lady Thatcher. I thought that I could quote selectively from those speeches and punctuate my contribution with their words of wisdom. As Mr. R. A. Butler spoke mainly about agriculture and particularly about grain prices, and Mrs. Thatcher—who was the architect of, or at least the inspiration behind, the Education Act 1988—spoke about public access to local authority meetings, I gained almost nothing relevant to today's debate from an examination of their maiden speeches. My bright idea came to nothing.

I am also humbled by my great privilege to be the Member for South Holland and The Deepings. As such, I continue a long tradition of Conservative representation in south Lincolnshire. As my constituency is a new one, like my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) I enjoy the privilege of sharing the Opposition Benches with my two predecessors, my hon. Friends the Members for Boston and Skegness (Sir R. Body) and for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies). They each typify the pursuit of political conviction before political convenience, strength of argument above personal advancement, and I hope that during my time in the House I can continue in this vein.

I am proud to represent the constituency with the most charming name, if not the most charming Member. For those who are not familiar with south Lincolnshire, I should like to offer some insight into my glorious constituency. It is traditional, rural Britain with all the characteristics which one might therefore expect. It has a hard-working, law-abiding, patriotic population—people who respect the soil and its products, who depend upon the elements and who are close to God. They are suspicious of pomposity, pretension and political correctness and of all other ephemeral and fashionable ideas. Those are the traditional, decent folk of south Lincolnshire and I am honoured that they chose me to be their representative.

It is just such humble, hard-working folk that the Bill is designed to injure. It will not damage the privileged and the wealthy; nor will it hurt people like the Prime Minister's parents who many years ago could afford to send their son to private school. It will not hurt people like the parents of the Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women or those of the hon.

Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), those of the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher), or those of other Labour Members with that kind of background.

The Bill is an attack on poor people. As has been said, 42 per cent. of those who enjoy the opportunities provided by assisted places have incomes below £10,000 per year. It is iniquitous to introduce a Bill which seeks to limit and stifle the chances of those people. I have no vested interest in saying that: I have no connection with private education. I am proud to have been a grammar school boy, and as such I have no links with private education.

The opportunity for working-class children to go to grammar school and to climb the ladder of educational advancement is not available to many of our fellow citizens. In many parts of the country there is no such chance. The assisted places scheme gave an opportunity to people in areas where the alternative was the dull egalitarian mediocrity which is all that so many local education authorities offer.

Although I do not claim to be an expert, I speak with some authority on this, having been a member of such a local education authority for more than a dozen years. That dull, egalitarian mediocrity is what faces millions of children. The assisted places scheme provided a glimmer of light, an opportunity. They were not compelled to join the scheme: it was an option and a choice. No one was obliged to take up a place; it was something that one had to apply for. But why take that opportunity from those 37,000 people? To take away that extra option, that extra choice, is both negative and pernicious.

Fortunately, Lincolnshire has retained selective education, so there is still some choice for my constituents, but the message that must ring out loud and clear in the Chamber today is that there can be no choice without diversity. It is extraordinary that, earlier in the debate, Labour Members displayed hostility to diversity, which is the lifeblood of educational advancement. We shall achieve educational progress, advancement and evolution only by having various types of school and various ideas percolating in schools.

I wish to draw attention to three particular objections to the Bill, some of which have been mentioned in the debate. However, I feel that they require further amplification. First, the figures on the absorption back into mainstream education of children currently benefiting from assisted places are at best dubious. Allowing for the doubling of the scheme, we would gain about £268 million from the abolition of the assisted places scheme.

Yet the Department for Education and Employment calculates that, taking a typical average cost per child of about £2,700, it would cost about £208 million to return those children to state education, and a further £210 million to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds—bringing the total to £418 million. There is a massive shortfall in those figures and, frankly, there must be some error in the calculations. I put it politely because I understand that the conventions of the House forbid my saying anything more. At the very least, those figures are questionable, and on that basis they are not worthy of our support.

The second reason why I oppose the Bill is that the choice among existing schools would undoubtedly be reduced. If we reduce class sizes and thus limit the ability of popular schools to admit children, we shall by definition reduce choice. I hope that all those hon. Members who support the Bill will be frank and honest with people and admit that it will reduce and restrict opportunity and choice not just in relation to assisted places but in choosing a popular local primary school. To restrict class sizes, we shall have to impose limits on the number of children that those schools can take in.

That was alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead when she described her experience as chairman of an education committee. I have similar experience as a member—just a member, I hasten to add—of such a committee; in opposition, always in opposition. However, the ability of appeals panels on occasion to overrule initial judgments has enabled children to take school places that their parents wanted and from which the children have benefited. That will inevitably be curtailed by the Bill.

My third objection is that the misleading assertion that a reduction in class sizes will deliver an automatic benefit—a gain in terms of teaching and learning—is frankly not an accurate description of the facts. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment said in his opening remarks that class sizes matter, and of course they do. Class sizes are clearly one of the factors which affect a child's performance at school and the delivery of a good education, but they are not the only thing that matters in delivering good education.

Many other factors affect a child's progress at school and it can be sensibly argued that some of them are at least as important as—and possibly more important than—class size. I invite hon. Members to consider factors such as the home-school relationship, the physical quality of the teaching environment, the quality of teaching and learning itself, the leadership offered by the head teacher, and pre-school experience. To argue that none of those factors has as much impact as class size—that reducing class sizes alone will negate the impact of all those things—is to mislead the population. People have been encouraged to believe that there would be such a dramatic benefit—that suddenly their child's educational performance and teaching and learning experience would be transformed.

There is a correlation, but there is no direct correlation, as the Office for Standards in Education has accepted. In 1995, Chris Woodhead, who is now a popular figure on both sides of the Chamber, drew attention to the matter and made it clear that there was no such direct correlation. Most intelligent and sensible observers would share that view.

The Labour party must therefore bear some responsibility—I say this more in sorrow than in anger—for trivialising the debate on education, particularly over the past couple of years. By concentrating solely or virtually solely on class sizes, they have simplified and parodied the discussion and created expectations which now cannot be met—and they will regret that in the fulness of time.

It is also a sad indictment of the Labour party that its first piece of education legislation is entirely negative. The Bill axes an existing scheme: it destroys rather than creates. In the fulness of time, Labour Members may wish that their first measure had been more imaginative, more positive—perhaps building on an existing scheme and policy, developing and changing it, rather than simply axing and destroying it.

[Mr. John Hayes]

I am a grateful for the traditional indulgence that the House has shown me as a newcomer in making this speech. I shall not expect it in the future, and no doubt I shall not get it as I give notice that I intend to fight tooth and nail every Labour measure of this type which I believe restricts opportunity, reduces choice and thwarts initiative.

6.47 pm

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): I congratulate the hon. Member for the new constituency of South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) on his maiden speech. I have absolutely no doubt that, in the fulness of time, we shall engage in considerable debate on some of his views and I look forward to those debates. I also note that, in deepest England, the name of his constituency has a European tang to it and wonder whether that reflects his views. I offer him many congratulations and wish him well during his time in the House.

The Bill represents an important first step in meeting the key challenge that the Government have set themselves: to raise standards of education for all children in all schools. This Bill to phase out the assisted places scheme and instead to use the resources to cut class sizes for the youngest primary school pupils will not, as the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings said, be sufficient in itself to achieve our aims. However, it is momentous because it clearly encapsulates the difference in approach between new Labour and the Conservatives.

In the past 18 years, the Conservatives have shown that they have no faith in the public sector: "Private good—public bad" has been their mantra. That is why they focused on privatising rather than improving public services. That held as true for education as it did for the utilities, for transport, for housing and for health. It was reflected in the fact that most Conservative Ministers sent their own children to private schools. It was therefore logical for the Conservative Government to use public money to pay for places in the private sector.

Lady Olga Maitland, who formerly represented Sutton and Cheam and who lost her seat in the general election—to her surprise and, perhaps, our relief—revealed the Conservative Government's true attitude when, in the Standing Committee discussions on extending the assisted places scheme, she implied that the best education was not available in the maintained sector. Several speeches today have reinforced that view.

Last year's expansion of the assisted places scheme was an admission of defeat by a tired Administration who had run out of ideas to improve education standards for Britain's children. The Tories' answer to the nation's problem was to pay private schools to take a handful of children and to neglect the rest. New Labour will not ignore the rest. For us, the challenge is to raise the standards of all schools in the maintained sector so that all our children can enjoy the opportunities and privileges that the Conservatives reserved for the few. Our task is to ensure that parents and children experience standards in the maintained sector as good as the best in the private sector.

Of course parents want and should have choice—about that there should be no dispute—but choice will become a reality for parents only when they can choose between a large number of good schools. A choice between schools that do not offer high standards is no choice at all, and choice is certainly not created by a scheme which uses precious and limited public money to help a few children in a few schools. The way to create genuine choice is to use our resources to raise standards in all our schools.

The changes proposed in the Bill will lead to higher standards for about 500,000 young children, compared with only about 30,000 who are helped each year through the assisted places scheme. One of the scheme's principal attractions for parents is the lower class sizes that it offers their children. If class size really makes no difference, as Conservative Members have argued in the past, why do private schools advertise their smaller class sizes as a marketing point in their brochures?

Despite the former Secretary of State's rhetoric, parents, teachers and inspectors all agree that lower class sizes make a difference, especially in the crucial early years of a child's education. In fact, the chief inspector—who, we can all agree, has been effective in stirring the debate on education standards in the past few years—is himself on record as supporting that view. In an interview on the "Today" programme last October, he said:

> "Our class size report of 11 months ago looked at whether there was any connection that we could trace between the number of children in the class and the quality of those children's education. With the early years, that's from five to seven, we agree there was a connection. And we think that if this or any subsequent Government is going to find more money it ought to invest that money in early years education."

Mrs. Gillan: If class sizes are so important to every parent, can the hon. Lady explain why the Prime Minister sends his children to a school where class sizes are larger than the average in Islington, which I believe used to be in his own back garden?

Ms Hodge: The hon. Lady is referring to secondary education; I was referring to primary education. The issue of class sizes—as she should know, since she was an Education Minister—is especially pertinent at the early stages in a child's education. She might argue, and I might even agree with her, that there should be a redistribution of resources to achieve even smaller class sizes in the early years rather than the small classes that exist in some schools in the later years.

I agree that small classes alone are not enough, and no Labour Member is arguing that they are. The demand is for qualities such as leadership—to which the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings referred—a high standard of teaching and good discipline. Those are all factors that the new Government have pledged to improve. In contrast with the previous Government, the Labour Government have made dramatic announcements within the first month of taking office. Since the general election, the Government have announced that there will be mandatory head teacher qualifications—something that the previous Government did not pursue—measures to tackle failing schools, measures to improve literacy and numeracy, and moves to extend parent representation in schools and on local education authorities.

Those measures show that the new Labour Government have a real sense of purpose and a coherent programme that will improve education opportunities for all our children. It is a programme which aims to meet the needs of Britain's schools and children in a common-sense manner. There is no place for the tired dogma of the assisted places scheme or the bureaucratic nursery vouchers scheme.

No doubt there are those who view the Bill as an act of spite by the Labour Government against private schools, but nothing could be further from the truth. The assisted places scheme is inefficient as well as inequitable, and on those grounds alone it deserves to be abolished. It is also open to abuse. One headmaster is on record as saying that there are

"self-employed people with good accountants who do very well from the scheme."

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way again. In Committee on the last education Bill, she made similar accusations against the assisted places scheme and I asked her—or, indeed, any Labour Member—to report to my office any cases of abuse. She did not bring even one. Nor did any of her colleagues write to the Department with examples of abuse of the scheme.

Ms Hodge: The hon. Lady's memory is a little awry. She asked me to bring to her office cases of abuse relating to supply teachers who had not been registered. Had she continued as a Minister, I should without fail have brought such cases to her attention. The proposals before us today, however, will make such representations unnecessary.

Not only has the assisted places scheme been open to abuse; it has not made the best use of limited money. It has contributed little to the central aim, which should be shared throughout the House, of raising educational standards. Indeed, one of the challenges facing the new Government is to find new ways of working with the private sector to help in this vital task. That, too, is something that the previous Government failed to do.

Partnership and co-operation—not competition and the market—must inform our approach, and I hope that the Government will come forward with radical but practical ideas to enable such partnerships to develop. It is not just about using private schools with particular specialisms to educate children with particular needs or talents: it is about recognising the self-interest of individual institutions, but marrying that with the wider interest of the whole community.

The challenge is to think creatively about the resources available in the private sector and to use them for the benefit of the entire community. For instance, there could be greater sharing of swimming pools and playing fields, which are especially important in inner-city areas where so many children are deprived of the opportunity to enjoy sports at school. We could also use the experience of the private sector in preparing young people for specific exams—such as the Oxbridge entrance exams—so that opportunity can be extended to a wider range of pupils.

We could use teachers from the private sector to alleviate the skill shortages in the maintained sector and to ensure that a full curriculum is on offer to all our children. We could also introduce joint teaching, perhaps at sixth form level, so that the skills in both sectors can be deployed to the benefit of all children.

Those are just a few positive ideas for the future which could start to break down the traditional divide which has been so destructive between the public and the private sectors. Such ideas could offer enhanced opportunities for thousands of children. The Bill is not a traditional old Labour knee-jerk reaction to private schools—it is a sensible measure to improve our use of public money in education; but it must be only the first step.

The early years in a child's education are crucial to later performance. Fifty per cent. of a child's intellectual development occurs before the age of five. Yet according to the most recent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development figures that I have seen, we spend only 2 per cent. of our education budget on children in their early years, whereas the Swedes spend 17 per cent. on that crucial phase, the French 12 per cent. and the Italians 8 per cent. Also in stark contrast with other OECD countries, we do not have either national recommended minimum space allocations or a maximum statutory class size for primary pupils.

We must invest in early years education if we are serious about raising education standards, which will mean some tough decisions for the Government on redirecting resources from other sectors. During the tenure of the previous Government, I said that this country had education policy wrong. Currently our expenditure per annum per student in higher education is more than $15,000, whereas the Americans and the Japanese spend just under $12,000 per student per annum and the Germans and the French spend just over $6,000 per student per annum. I therefore believe that we must re-order our priorities.

We must, however, also hold to our pledge that within the lifetime of the Government, as we move people from welfare to work, we shall increase the proportion of public expenditure that is spent on education. More resources invested wisely makes sense. Money will not solve all the problems of the legacy that we have inherited, but some investment—especially in the early years—is vital, and the Bill is a start.

The Bill will allow us to take the first substantial action to raise standards in our schools. It will replace elitism with opportunity for all, and it will enable us to fulfil one of the five key pledges that won the overwhelming support of the electorate. It also shows Labour's commitment to excellence for everyone. Parents have voted for smaller classes, and it is now up to the House to deliver them.

7.3 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I am pleased to have an opportunity to say a few words on an important subject that is of great interest to many of my constituents. First, however, I should like to congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), and the Minister for School Standards on their appointments. I have already congratulated the Secretary of State on his appointment. I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment has a deep, professional and long-standing interest in education, and Opposition Members will certainly examine constructively and with interest the Government's proposals to improve standards in schools.

Conservative Members will, of course, part company with the Minister on the Bill. It will undoubtedly give her pleasure, because she has long been opposed to the assisted places scheme, and its introduction today must be why she and the Minister for School Standards have looked so happy. There is, however, another side to the Bill's introduction, and it must cause some concern and disappointment to those two Ministers, because I know, from my experience of serving in Committee with the

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Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, that she is a great supporter of consultation, parliamentary scrutiny and debate.

The Minister undoubtedly will remember that the Minister for School Standards, she and I served on the Committee stage of the Education Act 1993, and she will also remember the length of that Committee's sittings. She will remember how that Bill was introduced six months after the election of the previous Government, and after publication of a White Paper and a two-month consultation period. She will also remember just how anguished she and the Minister for School Standards were over a sittings motion on that Committee's sittings.

Today, however, we are debating the first measure introduced by Education Ministers, and it will be rushed through the House in less than a week. If the Minister for School Standards were a Back Bencher and free to think and speak about the matter, what would he think? I remember his eloquent words in a debate on the passage of the Education Act 1993. After the previous Government had published a White Paper, conducted two months of consultation and scheduled many hours of Committee work on the Bill, he said:

"The haste now being shown in the sittings motion points to a Government who are scared of debate and will not argue the issues, and who seek instead to rush the proposals through. That cannot be in the interests of the country or our children."—[*Official Report*, 17 November 1992; Vol. 214, c. 14.]

I know that such a stern and unbending devotee of parliamentary scrutiny as the Minister for School Standards must secretly and privately be feeling some anguish at the way in which the Bill is being rushed through the House.

I should like to take issue with the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge), who was being rather generous and gracious when she tried to suggest that the Bill is a new Labour proposal. It is very much old Labour, and old Labour has been very much in evidence in today's debate. In 1980, the former hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook was the Labour education spokesman. At that time, he could have been considered as mild new Labour; now, however, he is decidedly old Labour. In 1980, he said:

"all the assistance schemes basically help children who would have gone there anyway but who nevertheless, because of the schemes, receive added assistance from the State."—[*Official Report*, 16 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 237.]

In 1980, there was no question but that Labour was old Labour.

If any further proof is necessary that the Bill is an expression of old Labour's instinct against the assisted places scheme, the Liberal Democrats' opposition to the previous Government's policy over the past 18 years provides it. The Bill is an old Labour measure, and today some of the familiar old Labour arguments vilifying the assisted places scheme have again been trotted out.

We have heard from the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) and from other Labour Members that the scheme favours the privileged few over the many. We have also heard various sociological analyses of whether assisted students are middle class or working class, and questions have been asked about their parents' marital status. The fact is that the common denominator of people whose children are in the assisted places scheme is that they all belong to low-income families. Without some help, families at the top end of the income scale—those receiving a combined income of £25,000—would struggle to put a child through an independent school, and those at the bottom of the scale—those with a combined income of less than £10,000; and 40 per cent. of children on the assisted places scheme come from such families—would struggle even more.

The common denominator of those families is that they have a low income, and no Labour Member should be under any illusions about it. We have heard all their sociological analyses and all the talk from the Secretary of State about working-class and middle-class families, but the families benefiting from the scheme are on low incomes, and their opportunities will be taken away. The Government must accept that fact.

It is also not true that the assisted places scheme is somehow a subsidy to private education. Some time ago, the Minister for School Standards produced an analysis of the situation at 10 schools—one of which, Haberdashers' Aske's school, is in my constituency—which, he said, showed that those schools were receiving a huge subsidy from the taxpayer. Had he done a little more research, he would have found it a strange form of subsidy because, in the case of Haberdashers' Aske's, the places occupied by children on the assisted places scheme could be filled many times over by the children of parents wealthy enough to pay the full fees.

The fact is that schools such as Haberdashers' Aske's and schools under the old direct grant system like taking children on the assisted places scheme because they welcome the social mix that it creates within their schools and feel that it enables them to adhere to their historic ethos.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Estelle Morris): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman and I have a different view of what constitutes a low income, but will he confirm that 1,000 pupils on the assisted places scheme come from families with an income in excess of £24,000 and, indeed, that a third of the pupils on the scheme have always been in the private sector—in other words, their parents were able to pay for them in the private sector before they took up an assisted places scheme? How does the hon. Gentleman square that with his notion that all the children involved come from families with low incomes who could not afford private school places?

Mr. Clappison: Neither the hon. Lady nor I know how the circumstances of those families might have changed. The fact is that all are subject to a means test. It would be very difficult for them, even those with incomes of £24,000 or £25,000, to put their children through the scheme. Such incomes may seem large to some people, but the scale of fees in the independent sector is such that it would still be difficult for children of such families to take up an assisted place without some help.

The hon. Lady will know that families make a substantial contribution. No one could describe a family with a combined income of less than £10,000 as well off, no matter what part of the country that family lives in. Certainly in my constituency, an income of less than £10,000 is considered small.

A link has now been made between class sizes and the ending of the assisted places scheme. We should not be under any illusion—it has always been the aim of Labour

to do away with the scheme, but that link has now been made. It is perhaps a happy marriage of old Labour prejudices and new Labour aspirations.

There are some interesting questions to be asked about class sizes. Whatever the hon. Member for Barking says about other measures to improve standards, which we would welcome if they were constructive, the Labour party has isolated the issue of class sizes and exalted it above everything else. It has presented it as an article of faith—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members should read their party's manifesto, which makes it clear that one of Labour's key commitments is to reduce class sizes.

I do not want to get too involved in the controversy of whether class sizes are the key ingredient, but I note with interest that Mr. Woodhead, who has now been appointed as joint head of the Government's task force on standards, examined the issue and that an analysis by Ofsted concluded that there was

"no clear link between the size of a class and the quality of teaching and learning within it"—

[Interruption.] The hon. Member for Barking might pooh-pooh that. I do not know whether she was one of the many Labour Members who called for Mr. Woodhead's resignation, but I remind her that he is now head of the Government's task force.

Ms Hodge: If the hon. Gentleman is going to quote Mr. Woodhead, he should do so accurately. I, too, quoted Mr. Woodhead. He said that class size did not make a great deal of difference for older pupils but that it did make a difference in the early years.

While I have the hon. Gentleman's attention, I must ask him where he has been for the past three or four weeks, because there has been almost an announcement a day from the Department for Education and Employment on initiatives other than class sizes which are intended to raise educational standards. Such initiatives were sadly lacking in the tired last days of the Conservative Government.

Mr. Clappison: The hon. Lady is being a little ungenerous. We will work constructively with Labour Members, but she should realise that many of the proposals made by the Secretary of State and his colleagues are building on foundations that are already in place, such as the national curriculum, testing and inspection. Indeed, Ofsted itself was created by the previous Government, and Mr. Woodhead was defended through thick and thin. I welcome his promotion and also the interesting promotion of Professor Brigstock—*[Interruption.]*—Brighouse. He will bring his own insights to the matter. I shall say nothing more about Professor Brighouse—I know that his intellectual robustness cannot be questioned. He will bring special insights into failing schools, having responsibility for education in a local authority that comes near the bottom of the performance tables and which performs much less well than the neighbouring authorities of Coventry and Wolverhampton.

The hon. Member for Barking might want to take into account the interesting fact that a number of authorities in London, such as Islington, Southwark and Hackney, have a relatively low proportion of the sort of children whom she was talking about in classes of more than 30 but they still languish near the bottom of the performance tables. However, I do not want to go too far into that issue.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does my hon. Friend agree that we have heard a great deal of claptrap from Labour Members about raising standards, as if that was what the measure was all about? In fact, the Bill has nothing to do with raising standards. It is a petty, vindictive little measure that Labour has wanted to introduce for years.

Mr. Clappison: As I said, the Bill is a happy marriage of new Labour aspirations and old Labour prejudices, which is what we have heard today. The question is whether it will accomplish what it sets out to accomplish.

The Labour party has claimed throughout—it did so in its manifesto—that the savings made from the abolition of the assisted places scheme would be sufficient to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds to under 30. That was Labour's pledge, and I notice that in the press release accompanying the Bill, Labour made the same claim. The press release states:

"A detailed note on the Bill's contents is attached. The explanatory memorandum to the Bill explains that the finance released as a result of the phasing out of the Assisted Places Scheme will reduce class sizes for five, six and seven year olds to 30 or less by the end of this Parliament."

However, the explanatory memorandum to the Bill says no such thing; it says only that there will be savings and that they will be used to reduce class sizes. It does not say that the savings will be sufficient to reduce class sizes to under 30, and it is wise not to do so. I do not think that the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment could make that claim. The Government say that they know what the savings will be—they estimate them to be £100 million by the year 2000, and I see the hon. Lady nodding at that—but they cannot say whether they will be sufficient.

In a parliamentary written answer to me, the hon. Lady said that the Government had no idea what the cost would be of reducing classes for all five, six and seven-year-olds to below 30. They say that they know what the savings will be, but they have no idea of the cost.

The Government's claim is based on the interesting assumption, made somewhat cavalierly by the Government, that there will be no extra costs involved in educating in the maintained sector those children who would have been on the assisted places scheme. The Government have not mentioned a penny of additional cost because that would have to come off their estimated savings. Independent analysts who have examined the claim have found a massive black hole of about £250 million in the Government's plans over seven years. If the Government are not able to say that the savings will be sufficient, we are entitled to ask how they will meet the additional costs. We may have had some interesting pointers from the hon. Member for Barking.

The Government may have been cavalier with their financial estimates but they have been more than cavalier in their treatment of very young children on the assisted places scheme. It is possible for children in receipt of preparatory school education to receive an assisted place up to the age of 13. The head teachers of preparatory schools were naturally concerned before the election

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about whether those receiving assisted places at preparatory schools would be able to continue to do so up to the age of 13. They therefore pressed the then education spokesman, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), about that. He went to the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools conference. In correspondence with the head of the IAPS, he said:

"I said at the IAPS Conference that we would not take a place away from any child who was awarded one, but that we would not offer any more places."

The hon. Gentleman was pressed further on that by Mr. Davies Jones, head of the IAPS. One month before the election, in a letter to Mr. Davies Jones written in his capacity as Labour party spokesman on education policy, he said:

"Much will obviously depend on the school to which a child has been admitted. If a child has a place at a school which runs to age 13, then that place will be honoured through to 13."

There is not much room for doubt there. That was a cast iron guarantee from the Labour party before the election that assisted places would run through to 13.

This is a serious subject for head teachers in the IAPS and for parents whose children are on such places. They want assurances because their children's education is at stake. A child's education is important. Whatever claims were made before the election about the financial implications of the measure, it is important that the education of those on the scheme should be respected, should be taken into account and, dare I say, should be paramount.

Mr. Forth: Does my hon. Friend think that the fact that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) was not appointed to the Department for Education and Employment has any significance? Does he think that that fact reduces the strength of the commitment that he made when he was a Front-Bench spokesman on education—a commitment reneged on by the Government after the election?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am sure that he agrees that Governments should keep their promises on such sensitive and important issues. Labour Members may laugh, but it is no laughing matter to children in at least one school in my constituency. Their education is at stake. Before Labour Members dismiss the issue out of hand, I remind them of the words of the Secretary of State, who was asked during the debate on the Queen's Speech about the fate of children who are already on assisted places.

I drew consolation at the time from his words, as, I suppose, did parents and teachers who are interested in the issue. He said:

"During the general election campaign, I said that children who have been allocated places will be permitted to take them up. We shall legislate within weeks to ensure that schools do not abuse the licence that was given to them to look after the interests of children by agreeing to places for 1998 or 1999 onwards. The hallmark of this Government will be to put children before dogma. It will be to ensure that the interests of our children come first on every occasion."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 183.]

I took that as a recognition from the Secretary of State that this was an important and sensitive subject. Imagine my surprise to find that the Bill and the accompanying literature make it crystal clear that the places that I am referring to will not end at age 13, as the Labour party had promised, but will instead end at age 11.

I asked the Secretary of State about that today. There can be little room for doubt that the Labour party is breaking the promise it made to the head of the IAPS. No other construction can be put on the words. To give him credit, the Secretary of State did not try to suggest that the Labour party was not breaking its promise. He produced a slightly bureaucratic justification, but made no acknowledgement of the importance of the promise that has been broken.

This is a serious matter for children on the scheme—very young children from low-income families—and for their parents. After all the fine rhetoric about morality and all the expectations that have been raised—in some cases deliberately so—and after all the things that have been said and the postures struck by the Government about how they would do business, I am surprised that in the Bill, which is not just their first Education Bill but will be their first Act passed after taking office, they are breaking a promise made to the parents of young children on low incomes about how long they will be able to stay at school.

Conservatives will oppose this measure, which embodies old Labour prejudice and hostility. It takes away opportunities for low-income families, and there are considerable doubts that it will accomplish what it sets out to achieve. The Labour party adopted a cavalier attitude towards the representations that were made on the subject to gain election. Most seriously, the Bill involves a shabby breach of a promise that will affect children in my constituency and up and down the country. I am surprised that the Government want to set out on their legislative programme on this note.

7.25 pm

Ms Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech in this Chamber as the newly elected Member for Reading, East—the first Labour Member for Reading, East for 27 years and the first woman Member for the constituency. This is a moment of great pride for me.

Reading has been a settlement for almost 2,000 years, as far as anyone can tell, because it is a place where two rivers meet—the Thames and the Kennet. Not many people think of Reading as being on the banks of the Thames, but so it is. The town has not always sung its own praises as perhaps it should have done, but it has been immortalised by some of our greatest writers. Thomas Hardy referred to it as Aldbrickham in "Jude the Obscure".

One of the most famous inhabitants of Reading was not there by choice. He spent almost two years in Reading gaol and was released 100 years ago this month. I refer, of course, to the beautiful genius, Oscar Wilde. Reading will now make amends to Oscar. He did not choose to be with us, and society should say that we are sorry.

It is customary to pay tribute to one's predecessor on these occasions. I am pleased to pay tribute to Sir Gerard Vaughan, who had a long and at times distinguished career in the House. I have never been able to establish the truth of the persistent tale that, as a doctor, he was called into service when various hon. Members

over-indulged in various ways and found themselves unwell. I am sure that he would have given what service he could.

As Sir Gerard retired before the election and was not defeated, I would like to pay a small tribute to the Conservative who sought, unsuccessfully, to be his successor—a man who is probably well known to most in the House; the former transport Minister, John Watts. I do so because, throughout a bruising election campaign, he displayed great dignity and the qualities of a gentleman, which we do not always experience from the Conservative party.

We are here to talk about education and the assisted places scheme. We must focus resources on education in the early years. If we do not do that, what we do for later years is wasted. Education is a lifelong process. That idea is especially close to my heart, as both my daughter and my mother are university students at the moment. I am finding it a little hard to concentrate, because my mother is awaiting her degree finals result and I hope to find it out soon. My daughter has another year to go. When we debate education under this new Labour Government, we must remember that we are talking about all people of all ages, of all income levels, from all classes and from all walks of life.

My mother had a lifelong dream that, one day, she would be able to go to university. In her late sixties, she has managed to do that. She says that she wishes she had been able to go to university sooner. She feels that she was disadvantaged by having had not very good and not very well-organised schooling during the war years; there were various reasons for that.

Let us remember that, if we fail our five, six and seven-year-olds, we fail those children not just at that age, but for the whole of their lives, because they will achieve less well. Their children are likely to achieve less well as a result, and so it goes on. When we get into confrontation and debate on the abolition of the assisted places scheme, we must remember what is really important—the future. We have a new Labour Government who are looking to the future. Let us remember what really matters.

7.31 pm

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I fear that I have no Oscar or gaol to claim in my speech, but I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Reading, East (Ms Griffiths).

I am grateful and relieved to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during a positive plethora of maiden speeches in the opening days of the new Parliament. I am only too aware that some debates in the House resemble a veritable Baedeker's travelogue round the British isles which may well be of only passing interest to hon. Members who are yet to finalise their holiday arrangements. I will therefore keep my introductory comments brief in a tradition initiated by a former Member for the old Arundel and Shoreham constituency.

Captain Henry Kerby, who represented the constituency between 1954 and 1971, made the opening remark:

> "The making of a maiden speech must be one of the very few occasions when a Member of this House appreciates to the full the grim truth of that old adage, 'It is good to speak, but far better to remain silent.'"—[*Official Report*, 22 March 1954; Vol. 525, c. 915-16.]

Not unusually, the subsequent speech by the hon. and gallant Member on the subject of the pre-revolutionary Russian railway infrastructure lasted only a few minutes. Indeed, it is one of the few recorded examples of any speech by him in the House before his untimely death 17 years later in 1971. He is certainly recorded, however, as being a man of outspoken and strong views in his constituency.

It is a great honour to have been elected as the first Member of Parliament for the new constituency of East Worthing and Shoreham. It is formed out of parts of the previous seats of Shoreham and Worthing, which has grown to become the largest town in West Sussex. I pay tribute to two of my most distinguished predecessors. Worthing only eyer had two Members of Parliament.

I hope that the House will remember with affection my immediate predecessor there, Sir Terence Higgins, who served Parliament and the constituency loyally and tirelessly for 33 years. His career, spanning Olympic runner, Financial Secretary to the Treasury and numerous House Committees, will be a hard act to follow—particularly the Olympic running. He also carried on the tradition of all Members of Parliament for Worthing of receiving a knighthood. I am a great believer in tradition.

Former Members of Parliament for Shoreham include Inigo Jones in the 1620s. Although his parliamentary career may not have matched the distinction of Sir Terence's, it may be topical to mention that he came to Westminster following the expulsion of the former Member, Sir John Leedes, for failing to take the oath. Madam Speaker may be interested in the precedent created in Shoreham in the 1620s.

As a son of Sussex, born, bred and educated in the county—no true Sussexonian recognises the iniquitous local government boundary review of 1973 which wrenched east from west—it is a particular pleasure to be able to return to my roots and represent my fellow countymen in Parliament. It cannot be deemed controversial, but surely a statement of fact that Sussex is by far one of the most beautiful counties in the country.

The East Worthing, and Shoreham constituency combines all that county's virtues, with dramatic, downland landscape, once fashionable seaside resorts, light industry and a sizeable retirement population. We take in world-beating companies at the leading edge in vacuum pump and simulator equipment production, pharmaceuticals and motor cars, and the nearest working channel port to London. In Lancing, we have the largest village in the country, in Shoreham, the oldest commercial airport in the country and in Worthing, the oldest population in the country.

Worthing has twice the national average of over-65-year-olds and three times the national average of over-80-year-olds. I am told that, by the year 2030, the average life expectancy of a Worthing woman will be 105—a sobering thought. I am, however, delighted to say that I have many who have achieved that ripe old age already. I have recently accepted an invitation to the 106th birthday party of one delightful constituent whom I met during the recent general election campaign and who, of course, being still bright as a button at the age of 105, informed me with gusto that she had already made her postal vote for the Conservatives.

It is not just because of that vested interest that I will pay close attention to the actions of this new Government in overhauling the way in which the pension system works, so that my 105-year-old and millions like her will receive a full and meaningful pension well into the next

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millennium, without the pension pot running prematurely dry, as threatens to happen in the many continental countries that lack comprehensive private pension provision. On that score, I believe that the previous Government's proposals for basic pension plus provided a bold and practical way forward in tackling the problem. I hope that the new Secretary of State will revisit those proposals with an objective and open mind, and without the near-hysterical soundbite antagonism of the general election campaign.

The preponderance of elderly residents in East Worthing and Shoreham brings with it particular and increasing pressures on the NHS locally. That is not a matter for debate now, but one of my main priorities will be to fight for a fairer share of the health funding cake in my part of Sussex. As I see time and again, many of my pensioners are finding the going tough. I am particularly aware of the problems experienced by those caught in the elderly poverty trap who do not quite qualify for additional benefits, but who have to live on little more than the basic pension. A review of pension arrangements must look at that as a matter of urgency.

Many elderly people, despite their own problems, express great concern about the next generation and especially about the educational and job prospects for their grandchildren. Here I turn to the specific matter in hand—the new Government's education proposals.

In the general election, all three parties majored on the priority of improving our education system. The new Prime Minister spoke of "Education, education, education". The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) positively eulogised about the all-embracing miracle cure of a penny on income tax—possibly the most overspent penny in the history of spending a penny. I agree, however. I believe—this may alarm my hon. Friends temporarily—that much of what we have heard from the new Government on education, including this Bill, is both good and original. The trouble is, as I think Dr. Johnson said, what is good is not original and what is original is certainly not good. Indeed, that adage might well be applied to an awful lot of what has emanated from the Government in recent weeks.

In education, we are hearing much about what is to be dismantled, disbanded or discarded, but precious little about what improvements will take their place.

I have never experienced a public school education, but as the Member of Parliament for a constituency that can boast many fine private-sector schools, some of which offer assisted places, I can see the opportunities that public schools can provide to families who are in a position to take advantage of them. The greatest growth in those taking up assisted places has been among children from low-income families. There has been a particular rise in the proportion of ethnic minorities taking up assisted places. They all appreciate the outstanding academic success of assisted-places schools, which, for example, achieve near double the national average of GCSE passes, as my right hon. Friend the former Secretary of State for Education and Employment said.

It is paradoxical that Government Members have claimed superior academic performance by many LEA-funded schools over assisted places schools. If that were exclusively so, parents would surely not want to opt for assisted places and the scheme would wither and die by natural market forces. That is obviously not so. It should be argued that the assisted places scheme is not necessary because all schools have come up to the standard of schools offering assisted places, and not the other way round, as we have heard so often from the Government Benches.

I was interested to hear the letter read out by the Secretary of State, which he received in correspondence with St. Andrew's school in Eastbourne—not least because both my brother and my sister attended that school. The letter is another example of the unseemly rush to dismantle the scheme—despite the mayhem that will be left behind. The Government seem rather oblivious to the needs of children currently in assisted places, who will be left in the lurch. It seems extraordinary to deny success to families simply because they cannot afford it. Instead, we should be looking to extend such opportunity for excellence to as many children as possible.

I am greatly worried about the similar apparent stifling of parental choice represented by proposals to abolish the nursery voucher scheme just weeks after it came into operation nationwide. In West Sussex we have long enjoyed one of the best records of achievement among LEA schools. That is in no small part attributable to a varied and successful tradition of independent nursery school provision offering quality early years learning, as has been said. The beauty of the nursery voucher scheme was that it acknowledged that the people best suited to decide on the most appropriate education facilities for their children were the parents of those children. When allowed to work on a level playing field, the nursery voucher system allowed access to independent, Church or LEA nursery provision depending on parents' choices, regardless of their means.

The nursery voucher scheme will be sorely missed in west Sussex, all the more so because the many nursery schools that I have visited in my constituency over the past year have worked hard to prepare for it and to pass the rigorous Ofsted inspections designed to maintain uniform standards across the country. It will be even more missed because parents who have recently taken advantage of the voucher scheme face its abolition from the beginning of next term with little idea of what will replace it or where their children will be attending school. That mush and muddle is serious for many parents who just last month enthusiastically took up nursery vouchers.

On 1 May, the Conservatives regained control of West Sussex county council after a short interregnum. I am proud to note that the first act of the new administration was to release £1.5 million from central LEA bureaucracy to flow straight to our schools. That must be right. It has been a hallmark of my party's education policies to give the greatest degree of financial independence to schools themselves, backed by a national benchmark of standards and curriculum requirements. That gave the experts—teachers, parents and governors—the responsibility to determine how best to concentrate resources on their pupils.

I speak as one who for many years served as a governor in particularly difficult inner city schools at primary and secondary level. I also speak as one who had the genuine privilege to stand against the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) at the 1992 election. Notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's obvious commitment to Sheffield, the parlous state of schools that I witnessed in that city under the life-long control of

Sheffield city council could not provide a greater contrast with West Sussex. Quite simply, maximising funding earmarked for education in schools themselves came well down Sheffield city council's list of priorities.

It is my fear that the education proposals before us mark the return of the nanny-state approach—that LEAs and all the bureaucracy that goes with them are best. I sincerely hope that, as the Government progress their education programme, that will not prove to be so.

I am grateful for the patience of the House. I however fear that Captain Kerby may judge me to have detained hon. Members for rather too long.

7.44 pm

Mrs. Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. As the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) said in his fine speech, this is the season of maiden speeches. June is traditionally the season of strawberries, sweet and red. One always says that one cannot have enough of them. Perhaps that is true of maiden speeches.

Like other new hon. Members, I sought advice on my speech and was told not to be controversial. I must, however, start by taking issue with my hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) and for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), who claimed that their constituencies were the most beautiful. That claim is erroneous. The most beautiful constituency is in fact the Forest of Dean. I say that because I assume that my hon. Friends have not seen for themselves the splendour of the oak and fern-covered limestone hills about which Dennis Potter wrote.

The Forest of Dean lies between and is isolated by the magnificent Wye valley and the mighty River Severn. The ancient forest mentioned in the Domesday book has provided charcoal for iron smelting since Roman times, great masts for Tudor and Stuart navies and now provides commercial timber and a wonderful wilderness where locals and visitors alike can roam and relax.

Although the Forest of Dean is a rural environment, it has a long history of industrialisation due to its mineral wealth. Iron has been worked from early times and it gives the area the materials for its steel working and engineering. Until 30 years ago, deep coal mines were the mainstay of the local economy. In recent years, however, there has been much change, with lighter engineering, building, food processing and the tourist trade becoming the major contributors to the area's economy.

Although the community is made up of small towns and little villages scattered throughout the forest, it is closely linked, and through its remoteness has developed a different dialect to the rest of Gloucestershire. It has a strong sense of its own identity and distinct traditions, one of which allows sheep to roam freely—even to wander in and out of Woolworth's on Cinderford high street. There is pride in being born within the St. Briavel Hundred, which allows males, once over 21 years old, to be freeminers. I am proud to have the honour to represent the beautiful area, where, due to its geographical location and industrial history, people have developed an individual and independent personality.

My immediate predecessor worked hard for the constituency. I hope one day also to have that reputation. He knew and admired the local traditions. Indeed, he took up and fought steely for the cause of the freeminers. He enjoyed the job and life here in Westminster, and was in the House for 18 years. I believe that he found losing such a life hard.

Another of my predecessors was Charlie Loughlin, an outspoken Yorkshireman—I should like to be like him too—who represented the Forest of Dean from 1959 to 1970. That was a difficult time for the Dean. The mines were being closed one by one. The last one, Northern United, was closed on the very cruel date of Christmas eve 1965. Village after village felt the shadow of unemployment and economic decline. There is still huge respect for Charlie for the work that he did in helping miners find alternative work.

The Forest has never known great prosperity and many of its settlements are still in the shadow of decline. In the past 20 years in particular, it has suffered from a lack of investment and regeneration. It is vital to ensuring the successful regeneration of the whole local economy that its young people are well educated, well trained and skilled. Educational success is the key to economic success.

I was a teacher for 18 years, when I principally taught secondary aged children with learning difficulties or those who required remedial help. In 1996, 43 per cent. of our 11-year-olds failed to reach the expected levels for their age in English and mathematics. It seems that more and more children are entering secondary schools without succeeding at the basics. They have already failed.

I can testify that remedial work with those children is long, time-consuming and expensive. In most schools such groups have a pupil-teacher ratio of 1:12, 1:8 or even smaller. That happens because teachers are most effective in smaller groups. Such a teaching ratio in remedial groups is a heavy cost on a school's budget, but it is one that must be borne given the present number of pupils that need that support.

In my 18 years of experience the majority of those children experiencing failure at mathematics or literacy had suffered from a poor early start, particularly at the critical ages of five, six and seven. The most common factor among those children was that they had suffered from being in large classes. I believe that first-time good practice in smaller classes, when the foundations of literacy and numeracy are laid, is better for the individual child and would be a lot less expensive for the secondary school system in the long run. Prevention is always better than the cure.

In addition, young teenagers who feel that they have failed educationally have low self-esteem. They are twice as likely to be truants, and to be disruptive at school, and they are more likely to be involved in crime outside school. There is a cost to society at large if we fail to invest in smaller classes when children are learning the basics.

Of course the independent sector has smaller classes. Conservative Members know that because they send their children to schools in that sector. In 1996, just 176 children in Gloucestershire, where the Forest of Dean is located, participated in the assisted places scheme, compared with 81,000 educated by the state in the county. Labour's values are designed to provide good-quality education for the majority and not to defend a few privileged people.

[Mrs. Diana Organ]

The parents of children in the primary schools of the Forest of Dean want smaller classes. That is especially true of those whose children attend Mitcheldean, where there are classes of 35 for year 2, or those who attend Tutshill, Coalway, the Church of England primary school in Lydney or St. Whites in Cinderford. The list goes on and on. The five, six and seven-year-olds in all those schools are in classes of well over 30 pupils.

The parents of those children fund, through their taxes, the education for a privileged few in the assisted places scheme. Those parents fund independent education, which, per child, costs the state two or three times more than that which is spent on their children. Is that right? Is that socially just? Surely not.

Nationally, the number of primary school classes of more than 30 has risen from 24 per cent. in 1992 to 31 per cent. in 1997. That is a shameful record. Class sizes make a difference. In the 1995 Ofsted report, Christopher Woodhead made it quite clear that smaller class sizes were beneficial for primary school children aged five, six and seven. Academics know that smaller class sizes make a difference; teachers know that, as do parents and even the children in those classes. It seems that only the previous Government would not acknowledge their importance.

The Labour Government know that smaller class sizes matter. The Bill will take action to reverse the rise in class sizes. That change must be the mere first step because it is not the only thing that needs to be done. I will be pressing to ensure that we bring in a legal maximum class size of 30 for primary school children of all ages, and possibly of 25 for those of reception age.

The £100 million that will be made available in the next three years by abolishing the assisted places scheme will be used, together with other measures, to reduce class sizes for those important primary school years. That is educationally right, economically right, socially right and morally right.

The constituents of the Forest of Dean want smaller class sizes for their children, for their schools, for the future of their economy and for the simple social justice that it will deliver. They gave a mandate to the Government to be concerned for the many and not the few. They gave the Government a mandate to deliver social justice and to make education a priority. I am pleased to be able in my maiden speech to pledge my support for the Bill that will do that.

7.54 pm

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I am delighted to make my maiden speech. I am especially delighted and honoured to follow that given by the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ), because we have met on a number of occasions in the past few years during our general election campaigns. She delivered a robust and entertaining speech, which will no doubt be supported by the foresters.

I know the Forest of Dean well, and I must tell the hon. Lady that the most beautiful part of it is Symonds Yat. She will concede that that falls about 100 yd inside Herefordshire in my constituency. Nevertheless, I agree that the Forest of Dean is a most beautiful part of the country.

I am also delighted to note that the new hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) has reappeared in the Chamber. I listened earlier to his maiden speech. The cities of Hereford and Worcester have a tradition of rivalry that goes back over many centuries. Hereford is the older of the two cities, although I accept that Worcestershire has the slightly better cricket team.

I am also delighted to make my maiden speech during this important debate on education. For all Liberal Democrats, education is at the centre of our political thinking. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) for once again explaining our position to the House.

There are a number of private schools in my constituency, and, although I support our opposition to the assisted places scheme, my party and I are in no way opposed to those private schools. I look forward to working with many such schools in my constituency and I congratulate them on the high-quality education that they provide.

Among my first words in the House must be my thanks to the constituents of Hereford who elected me. They made a wise choice and, as my first promise, I pledge that my total commitment will be to them. For all hon. Members, it is a privilege to represent our constituencies, but for those who, like me, were born within our constituencies, it is perhaps a special honour.

I should like to say something about my predecessor, Sir Colin Shepherd. Many hon. Members, particularly those on the Conservative Benches, will remember him. He was an active member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and I am delighted to say that I have followed his tradition of membership of that important organisation.

More recently, Sir Colin was chairman of the House of Commons Catering Committee. I am sure that all new Members would like to join me in paying tribute to him for the excellent bars and restaurants within the precincts of Parliament—they are largely due to him. I am not sure whether it had anything to do with Sir Colin, but, on my first visit to the Strangers Bar, I was extremely amused to see that the beer on sale was called Shepherd's Delight.

Let me tell those hon. Members who do not know much about the Hereford constituency a little bit about it. It is made up of the southern half of the ancient county of Herefordshire. At the southern part, near Ross-on-Wye, is the Wye Valley, which was so eloquently described by the hon. Member for Forest of Dean. To the west are the foothills of the Black mountains, which border the Welsh seat of my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey).

Half the electors of my constituency, however, live within the city of Hereford. Those constituents, in common with many in Herefordshire, were delighted by the first meeting of the new unitary Herefordshire authority three weeks ago. After so many years of being attached—I must say that it was against our will—to the people of Worcestershire, Herefordshire has at last regained its independence.

The picture of local government throughout Herefordshire is not quite complete, because, although the market towns of Ross-on-Wye, Leominster and Bromyard will retain their town councils, the city of Hereford, one of the three oldest cities in the country, will lose its district council when the unitary authority takes over from it next

April. Unless arrangements are made either for the parishing of the city or for the appointment of charter trustees, the 616th mayor of the city, who was installed three weeks ago, could well be the last. I give notice that I will exert pressure on the relevant Ministers on the Treasury Bench to ensure that such an anomaly is not allowed to occur. Indeed, it would be a total betrayal of more than 800 years of history that started when the city gained its royal charter in 1189.

There are possibly two symbols of Herefordshire that are best known throughout the world—Hereford cattle and Hereford cider. Hereford cattle, like all British beef, suffered badly under the previous Government. Even the pure-bred herds of Hereford, fed solely on grass and with no history of BSE, have been subject to the export ban. My hon. Friends and I will support any measures that the Government introduce to get the ban lifted soon.

Hereford cider, perhaps the second largest private employer in Herefordshire, also suffered under the previous Government, who twice increased the duty on cider, while the duty levied on beer and lager remained constant. That policy cost hundreds of jobs throughout Herefordshire, and I intend to press the new Government not to continue down that misguided road.

Shepherd's Delight may be on sale as a draught beer in the bars in the House, but I am sorry to say that it is not possible to purchase draught Herefordshire cider here. Hon. Members of all parties may rest assured that I shall do everything I can to pressure the new Chairman of the Catering Select Committee to rectify that omission as soon as possible.

I made a manifesto pledge to establish an all-party cider group—we already have beer groups and whisky groups—but, after the Liberal Democrats' great success in Taunton, North Devon and North Cornwall, among other places, it will be hard to find a cider-producing area that is not represented by us.

I referred to my immediate predecessor, Sir Colin Shepherd, and I want to say a few words about another predecessor of mine, Frank Owen, who was elected in 1929 as the last Liberal Member of Parliament for Hereford at the tender age of 23—young even by comparison with many current Labour Members. He was also the last Herefordian to represent the seat. He was defeated in 1931, after two short years in Parliament.

After leaving Parliament, Frank Owen had a glittering career in journalism, and became editor of both the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Mail*. After a period as a television journalist, he returned to fight the Hereford seat in 1955, and again in a by-election in 1956 that was bitterly contested even by today's standards. He failed on both occasions and handed his position as Liberal candidate to an up-and-coming young television journalist of the day, Mr. Robin Day, who went on to achieve better things.

Frank Owen went on to achieve even more greatness in journalism. He was once asked whether it were true that he had been a very young Member of Parliament. "Yes," he said, "I was elected by the highly intelligent, far-sighted people of the constituency of Hereford in 1929—and thrown out by the same besotted mob two years later." He said it with a smile on his face, and I would certainly never wish to echo those views about my constituents. I am honoured and privileged to represent his old seat.

I thank the House for its indulgence in listening to my speech, and I look forward to making a contribution in the future.

8.1 pm

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): I begin by thanking you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the House for doing me the honour of listening to me this evening.

I am proud to inform the House that I represent two parties: the Labour party and the Co-operative party. In the general election, I stood as a Labour and Co-operative candidate. The Co-operative party is the political party representing the wider co-operative movement and is dedicated, as I am, to promoting co-operative principles. For that reason, I am proud to be referred to as the Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament for Loughborough.

It is my first and pleasant duty to refer to my predecessor in the Loughborough constituency, who is now the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell). Unlike many hon. Members who have said goodbye to their predecessors in their maiden speeches, I look forward to the opportunity of saying hello to mine on the Opposition Front Bench. I shall watch the Conservative leadership election with a certain amount of local interest.

I was sorry that, in the Queen's Speech, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary did not introduce legislation on nuisance neighbours. The Loughborough constituency is placed directly between Charnwood and Rushcliffe. I know that it is improper to mention people's names in case work, so let us refer to my nuisance neighbours as Ken and Stephen.

The right hon. Member for Charnwood represented Loughborough for 18 years, having entered the House at the tender age of 26. He was then the youngest Member. I suppose that, at the grand old age of 32, he would have felt quite ancient, as I do, looking at some of the younger Members that we have now.

The right hon. Gentleman rose steadily through the Government ranks, despite being regarded as rather wet in the Thatcher years. No party could overlook his obvious talents. His ministerial duties placed a heavy burden on him in the past few years, but he had a formidable record for hard work in the constituency, and I hope to emulate him in that.

Over the past two years, I have had the honour to serve as the right hon. Gentleman's local councillor. In the troubled times that he may have in the coming few weeks, he will be more than welcome at my surgeries, of which I will give him the dates and times—especially after the Conservative leadership election result is announced.

Like the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), I am proud to represent people with whom I was educated and with whom I have worked and shopped. It is a great honour to be in the House and to be a member of that community. I do not claim that Loughborough itself is as great as Hereford or the Forest of Dean, but we have the Charnwood forest and the great areas of Leicestershire that I am proud to represent.

Loughborough is a combination of urban and rural areas within the triangle of the three major cities of the east midlands: Leicester, Nottingham and Derby. That is a great economic strength and we hope that we can promote the location, which is only two hours' drive or

[Mr. Andrew Reed]

railway journey from about 60 to 70 per cent. of the English market. It is a great place for relocation, if any company should be so minded.

My constituency also contains some smaller villages; I have lived in and represented one of those—Sileby—for the past five years. It is the home of the previous Quorn hunt and offers beautiful locations in the Wolds villages. It has a richly diverse population. There is a thriving ethnic minority population in Loughborough, and we enjoy excellent race relations. I have taken great pleasure in the past few years in visiting and meeting people in the Shree Ram Krishna centre, the Gudwara, the Gheeta Bwhan and the mosque. I have always been given the warmest of welcomes, and I hope to develop our excellent relationships.

People in the villages are extremely proud. The villages—particularly Shepshed and Sileby—were developed and built around the textile industry at the turn of the century. Sadly, those industries have been in decline for the past 10 to 15 years; but there is still great strength of feeling in the communities.

I want to spend my time in the House reviving the textile and small engineering sectors, to ensure that the villages and small towns can survive. As soon as the factories and smaller workshops start to move away from those places, the high streets start to die and community spirit tends to go with them. I hope that some of the measures that we have proposed can start to make a difference.

In places such as Sileby, it is especially important to ensure that one is part of the community. I have been there for only five years, and I understand that it is difficult to be accepted as a real resident of Sileby. While out canvassing, I came across somebody who had moved there when she was three; she was now 76, but she said that she was still referred to locally as "Ethel from Leicester". Obviously, I have a long way to go before finally being accepted as a genuine Sileby resident.

The town of Loughborough is dominated by the university: out of 60,000 residents, about 11,000 are students; there are 6,000 people in the Asian community; and we have many skilled research and development staff involved with the university, with British Gas research or with large pharmaceutical research and development companies such as Astra and 3M.

The economy of Loughborough has changed significantly since the right hon. Member for Charnwood made his maiden speech 18 years ago. There has been a major decline in the textiles sector and, especially, in manufacturing. The saddest loss for us all has been the great decline of the Brush factory. Many hon. Members will have travelled in trains pulled by Brush. In the early 1980s, the work force was about 6,500 strong; it is now about 2,400. Everybody knew somebody who worked at Brush in Loughborough. I hope that we can start to revive that company and the fortunes of engineering.

The complexion of the local economy is changing. I do not want to concentrate only on the engineering sector and the manufacturing base: Loughborough offers excellent opportunities for the high-tech, high-skill, high-wage economy that we want to establish.

Only two weeks ago, we were able to open a fibre-optic training centre, the first of its kind in the country, at Loughborough college. The university has demonstrated exactly the sort of partnerships that we want between higher education and industry. The Prime Minister opened the British Aerospace laboratory at Loughborough university 18 months ago.

The university is also well known for its second skill, sport. One thing that we in Leicestershire can claim is sporting excellence over the past 12 months. My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) mentioned Worcestershire. Worcester may have the most beautiful cricket ground in the country, but Leicestershire's team won the county championship last year.

Leicester also has a football team that, despite my original fears, did not get relegated from the Premiership and went on to win the Coca-Cola cup. Fortunately, that was the only time that the blues beat the reds this year, and I welcomed that victory. To me, as a member of the Leicester Tigers rugby union club, the greatest honour was winning the Pilkington cup this year. The home of the British academy of sport will soon be decided. I am sure that the Sports Minister will look favourably on Loughborough, with its fine reputation for athletics and for sport in general and with its central location.

Two weeks before the general election was called, I knew that we were on for a landslide. I still play rugby for Birstall, which is just outside my constituency. For the first time, playing at fly-half, I managed to score four tries in a 98-nil win—a good omen for the landslide that we got a few weeks later.

I wanted to speak in this debate because education plays such a key role in the life of my constituency. The university and the college are both important, but this debate is especially important because we know that it is the early years that make the difference in enabling people to succeed in later years.

I am a governor of Sileby Highgate school, where class sizes range between 34 and 39 for the seven classes. It is abysmal that children and staff work in such conditions. That is why this debate is important. The people to whom I talked on doorsteps and outside schools knew that class sizes matter. They were desperate to make a real change. That is why I welcome these proposals.

Right across Loughborough, hundreds of parents are writing to me to ask when we can get this measure through and whether it will affect their children when they go back to school in the autumn. They desperately want the change to go through. That is why I am pleased to be able to play a small role in ensuring that we can push through this legislation to ensure that the vast majority of people in my constituency benefit from the changes that we are going to make.

8.12 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid–Norfolk): I compliment the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) on an excellent speech and wish him all the best. Making one's maiden speech at the tail end of a debate such as this is a matter of stamina as much as anything else. It tests all one's faculties, but one advantage is that it enables one to observe and listen to a wide variety of Members, old and new, and to learn about the Chamber and the subject under discussion.

Like other new Members, I am delighted to be here to represent my constituency. I am only the second Member for Mid-Norfolk, which was created in 1983. Its first

Member was Richard Ryder, who has been transferred to another place. He had a distinguished political career in the House. Before 1983, he worked as political secretary to Margaret Thatcher. He was then selected for the new constituency of Mid-Norfolk, and straight away made an impact as a good constituency Member and achieved the ultimate height of public service by serving as a Minister.

As a constituency Member, he pushed through the House the Bill that established the Broads Authority, which had a big impact not only on the eastern margins of my constituency but throughout Norfolk. He also began the long task of dualling the main east-west road through Norfolk, the A47. That task has not yet been completed, but I and Members for neighbouring constituencies will want to emphasise it strongly.

It was as Chief Whip from 1990 to 1995 that, in a quiet way, Richard Ryder made his mark. He was Chief Whip at a time, to quote Harold Macmillan slightly out of context, of a little local difficulty for the Conservative party. As Chief Whip, he demonstrated his self-effacing manner and what Matthew Parris called his "state-of-the-art circumspection" to a T. In 1992, he received the *Spectator* award as Whip of the year. It is said that, when asked why he wore his watch face down, he replied that the time of the day was not public information and that he would give it on a need-to-know basis. That tradition is followed by all Chief Whips.

It was that great Conservative party leader and Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli who judged that the office of Chief Whip required

"consummate knowledge of human nature, the most amiable flexibility and complete self-control".

Richard Ryder was that man and politician. I am sure that all hon. Members will wish him well.

In his maiden speech in 1983, Richard Ryder remarked that the constituency of Mid-Norfolk resembled a large banana balancing on top of Norwich to the west, north and east. It is a large constituency, 60 miles wide and 20 miles deep at its greatest extent. I love my constituency dearly, not least because I am a Norfolk boy by birth, but it is one of those constituencies about which people ask, "Where exactly is it?" Invariably, one has to go into a great deal of description. As a footnote, I think that many hon. Members relish, and want to keep, the idea of being Members located in a territorial constituency. I for one would reject any changes to the electoral system that meant that Members of Parliament were merely allocated from a list to a region. I hope that we would all reject that.

In my constituency, three market towns, East Dereham, Aylsham and Acle, form focal points in the west, north and east. The fourth and smallest market town—and because I now live there, I must also say that it is the most beautiful—is Reepham, which is approximately in the centre. There is no natural political, economic or social centre to my constituency. That has both weaknesses and strengths. One could argue that the Member of Parliament is, to all intents and purposes, the focal point.

The weakness concerns identity and unity of structure. The strength is that we in Mid-Norfolk look beyond the narrow constituency boundary to the county boundaries and beyond. We all love our constituencies, but most hon. Members recognise that many of our problems and challenges go beyond our narrow constituency interest. In the best possible sense, we need to co-operate. That does not, of course, preclude the most severe debates and political tiffs on matters on which we fundamentally disagree.

Traditionally, the county of Norfolk has a sense of isolation and a strong, potentially exclusive, local identity. Horatio Nelson would now be regarded as politically incorrect. He rose to high rank in the Royal Navy, disobeyed orders and was a man of extreme temperament. He publicly flaunted his mistress to all and sundry. The chief of naval staff would probably not promote him today. Nelson was a Norfolk man by birth. In the 18th century, he wrote of "going into" and "coming out of" Norfolk as though it was a physical entity separate from the rest of the United Kingdom.

More recently, the great writer and novelist Malcolm Bradbury, formerly of the university of East Anglia, our local university, commented that Norfolk was cut off on four sides: on three sides by the sea and on the fourth side by British Rail. I am happy to say that, thanks to the last Government's policy of privatisation, Anglia Rail is making certain that we are no longer cut off on the fourth side.

At its worst, Mid-Norfolk can be very parochial. We cannot claim a wit and a scholar like Oscar Wilde, although I suspect that some of my constituents might say, "Thank goodness for that." However, we did have Parson James Woodforde, who from 1774-1803 was rector of the small village of Weston Longeville, which is only a few miles from my constituency office. As many hon. Members will know, he kept a diary during that period.

Particularly vivid are his descriptions of the gargantuan meals he enjoyed with friends—something that many of us have not enjoyed in the past five hours—his impressions of the Norfolk countryside and his enthusiasm for what is now regarded, at least by many Labour Members, as the politically incorrect pastime of country sports and for something now forbidden by the Labour party, political gossip. Although Woodforde lived in momentous times, his diary accords no more space to the fall of the Bastille in 1789 than to an account of how he bought an extra-large crab from a travelling fisherman—indeed, the crab is mentioned before the fall of the Bastille.

Hon. Members will note, however, that, at its best, my constituency looks beyond its parochial borders to the rest of the United Kingdom, to Europe and to the wider world. I would also argue that Mid-Norfolk adapts to change. It is a mixture of old and new, with one replacing the other sometimes, but—more frequently—the new acting as a complement or counterpoint to the old.

My constituency, like those of many other hon. Members, has seen massive population growth in the past 10 years, with families attracted to the beautiful environment of the county, business to new opportunities and pensioners because it is a good place to retire to. Many of my constituents drive to work outside the constituency. All that means that there is massive pressure on all the facilities and public services that we require.

My constituency was traditionally dominated by agriculture. That is less true today, but agriculture is still very important and supports a wide range of businesses and light industries. Today's farmers in Mid-Norfolk recognise that, above all else, farming is a business.

[Mr. Keith Simpson]

Nevertheless, the majority of my good farmers believe that farming is linked to the environment and the wider community.

If hon. Members can spare the time—I hope that my Whip will permit me to spare the time—that attitude will be seen when the Royal Norfolk show takes place later this month and when many people from my constituency and other constituencies will attend "The Countryside Rally" here in London on 10 July. I hope that that rally will prove to many hon. Members and to the citizens of the metropolis how much variety exists in the countryside, and how important jobs and a way of life are to tens of thousands of men, women and children.

Like many hon. Members, as part of museum week, I visited one of my local museums—the Gressenhall Norfolk Rural Life Museum and Union Farm. It is a marvellous museum, which educates people, especially children, about the change in the countryside and agriculture—education at its best, whereby the past is brought to life and compared with the present, and the future is looked to as well.

Tourism is also adapting to change in my constituency. Every year, hundreds of thousands of tourists visit Norfolk—the coast, the Broads, the countryside and our towns and villages. Mid-Norfolk gets its share, and the welcome aspect of that is, of course, money and employment. However, other hon. Members who represent constituencies in which tourism is an important industry will recognise the downside of tourism—pollution, noise, traffic and crime. Mid-Norfolk is more than a theme park.

Defence is rarely mentioned in the House these days, perhaps because of the end of the cold war. From 1941 to the late 1980s, East Anglia was one enormous airfield. During the second world war and throughout the cold war, we had strong links, not only with the Royal Air Force, but with the United States Air Force. Many USAF personnel still live in the region, although not in my constituency. I might be regarded as churlish in my maiden speech, but I have to say that many Labour Members were wrong in their assessment of the threat we faced in the 1970s and 1980s, and were slow to adapt to changing circumstances.

We in Mid-Norfolk have had to adapt. It was with great regret that we saw the RAF leave its old base at Swanton Morley, but, thanks to the hard work of my predecessor, Richard Ryder, we now have the 9th/12th Royal Lancers, an armoured reconnaissance regiment. Once again, I hope that hon. Members will take this comment in good part, but I have to say that in constituencies where many jobs depend on the presence of the military, Labour's strategic defence review—it seems that the Labour Government consists of a series of reviews, like Brian Rix come to Westminster—casts a deep pall over local communities. I sincerely hope that the Secretary of State will recognise the impact that the review may have on such communities.

Looking ahead to a future agenda, I turn briefly to the subject under discussion—education. Many hon. Members have commented on the different aspects of the assisted places scheme and whether its abolition will have an immediate impact on children and local communities. Only a few people in my constituency will be affected—perhaps a dozen; no more—but it will affect all of them as individuals, as my hon. Friends have said.

I have been greatly depressed by some of the arguments advanced by Labour Members. I felt as though I had been rewound 30 years to the sort of debates I remember having at university in the late 1960s—indeed, when I see the Home Secretary sitting on the Front Bench, I realise that I have actually returned to the late 1960s when, in a different guise, he was chairman of the National Union of Students. This first education Bill of the new Government misses the point. It is a mean, selfish little Bill, which provides a fig leaf for the fact that the Labour Government have failed to come up with the moneys to meet the challenge to achieve lower class sizes that they laid down in their manifesto.

Many Conservative Members are concerned that, for the past 10 years—in my own county, for the past two years—local education in their areas has been run either by the Labour party or by the Liberals. We find it a bit rich to be lectured about standards of education, class sizes and the way to fund education in the future when so many Labour and Liberal local education authorities have failed to come up with the goods. I know that we shall continue this debate in future.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to participate tonight. I welcome and relish the fact that I am here as Conservative Member of Parliament for Mid-Norfolk.

8.28 pm

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): As one new boy to another, I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on a fine and entertaining maiden speech. I disagreed with much of the political content, but I recognise that he will be a fine asset on the Opposition Benches. For my part, I learned something about Norfolk other than Mr. Matthews's famous turkeys.

It is an honour to address the House as the first Labour Member for the Birmingham constituency of Hall Green. I follow some distinguished Conservatives, such as Aubrey Jones, who went on to chair the Prices and Incomes Board, Sir Reginald Eyre, who I am happy to say is still working on behalf of Birmingham as chairman of the Heartlands development corporation, and my immediate predecessor, Mr. Andrew Hargreaves, whose initial contribution in the Chamber was on a housing Bill. Andrew Hargreaves is probably better remembered for his knowledgeable and valuable contributions on defence matters and his work to control illegal trade in anabolic steroids.

I can tell those who are not familiar with Hall Green that it is a truly lovely and largely residential area in the south-east of Birmingham. It lives up to its green title by being able to boast public parks, quality open space and numerous tree-lined streets. One famous landmark is Sarehole mill, where J. R. Tolkien spent his boyhood and which provided the inspiration for his books entitled "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings".

I understand that, just like Tolkien's character Frodo Baggins, many famous people make occasional pilgrimages to Hall Green in search of inspiration. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) visited a school in my constituency in the early days of the general election campaign. Alas, as we all know, his visit to Druids Heath failed to provide him with the magic that he was seeking.

I extend a warm welcome to all those who wish to visit Hall Green. My constituents will look after everyone who wishes to do so. Rest assured that it is no journey to the land of Mordor.

Tonight, I wish especially to talk about education opportunities for the children of Hall Green. The constituency has its fair share of five, six and seven-year-olds taught in classes in which there are more than 30 pupils. There are many good schools that enjoy good standard assessment task results and good Ofsted reports—for example, Colmore and Hall Green infants, Woodthorpe and Grendon junior and infant schools, and Robin Hood junior and infants school, which is particularly strong in information technology, to name only a few.

The fact remains that young children are being taught in classes that are too large. As a parent whose daughter is due to start school in September, I am only too conscious of the pressure we place on children and staff if class sizes are too large.

Assisted places are, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, little more than a subsidy to those who need it least. They are supported by a party that puts more emphasis on vouchers and subsidies than on opportunities in the early years.

Assisted places and nursery vouchers go hand in hand. Birmingham city council has a good record in providing early-years places. The policy is to provide at least part-time places for all three-year-olds, for parents who wish to take them up. Much has been achieved, but there are still parts of Hall Green where there is a need to achieve more. Nursery vouchers will not help. Birmingham's experience is that they are costly and bureaucratic. They divert staff time from work with children, so that staff are acting as little more than ticket collectors, chasing vouchers for children already in school. Vouchers have not created one additional nursery place.

Birmingham is not averse to public-private education projects. The "Wrap around" project is pioneering such work. "Wrap around" seeks to develop a model for early-years service provision by using junior and infant schools, in conjunction with private nurseries, to focus on a complete [illegible] of early-years and parent-oriented services. I do not rule out the possibility of greater co-operation between the local authority and the private education sector in pursuit of raising standards and increasing opportunities, but I object to the expensive promotion of worthless ideological tokens or subsidies that help only a few children at the expense of the many.

The parents I meet want above all a decent education for their children. They need to know that their children will get a fair chance, no matter which school they attend. That is why I support the drive to raise standards, and why I am delighted at the news of Professor Tim Brighouse's appointment to the new standards task force, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned earlier in the debate. I have seen at first hand exactly what Professor Brighouse has achieved in a relatively short time in Birmingham.

I enthusiastically welcome the measures that are proposed by the Government. I welcome the proposals to reduce class sizes, by using the money saved through ending the assisted places scheme. I look forward to an age when education is at the top of our agenda, and is a passport to opportunity for all children, irrespective of their background. I look forward also to teachers and educators once again receiving the respect that professional people deserve, and support and encouragement from the Government and parents, which is a prerequisite for success.

We need to give a clear message that the Government are committed to raising standards and finding solutions, and that the bad old days of creating division and finding scapegoats are gone for ever. Our children are far too important to be offered anything less.

8.37 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) on his maiden speech. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on his maiden speech. My hon. Friend has the ability to make me laugh, and I shall look forward to hearing him over the next five years. There will be occasions when a sense of humour will be useful.

I have the proud honour of representing the Poole constituency in Parliament. Poole has a long and proud history. It was a county borough, and next year will mark the 750th anniversary of the borough. Poole was very disappointed to lose some powers, such as education, in the early 1970s. It is pleased that it has now achieved unitary status and that since April it has had full control over facilities within the borough.

With the great honour of representing Poole, I pay tribute to my predecessors. It is a large and growing borough. Indeed, it is nearly the same size as Bournemouth. Whenever a boundary review takes place, substantial changes ensue. The key point is that there are essentially two Members for the borough, 62 per cent. of which I represent. In 1983, when the previous boundary review took place, the borough was spread between Bournemouth, West and Poole.

That being so, I pay tribute to two predecessors. One is my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), whose talents hon. Members will no doubt continue to appreciate. My hon. Friend skilfully looked after one eighth of my constituency from 1983, that being the Bourne Valley ward.

The other Member, John Ward, has now retired. John is of a generation that we have almost lost from the House, for he saw service in the second world war as a navigator with Bomber Command. Together with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who is still a Member, John Ward was one of the few Members of this place in the previous Session who had seen war service.

It is perhaps a tribute to the post-war settlement that we probably have fewer Members who have seen military service, either voluntarily or involuntarily, in this Parliament than at any time this century. John was elected late, at the age of 54. He served 18 distinguished years in the House and had the honour of being the former Prime Minister's parliamentary private secretary at the end of the previous Parliament.

I have had the great honour over the past few weeks of going to many charities and organisations within the borough of Poole and seeing John Ward celebrated and

[Mr. Robert Syms]

congratulated by his constituents on the work that he has done. His work was appreciated by the people of Poole. When I went around during the election campaign, everybody had a good word to say about John as a conscientious and diligent Member of Parliament. I am sure that all hon. Members wish John—and, indeed, Jean—Ward a long and prosperous retirement.

Poole is a beautiful place. If hon. Members do not believe that, they have only to drive around the borough to see that that is the sign on the back of almost every car there, because it is the slogan of the borough council. The fact is that it is true. It is a very beautiful place. Many hon. Members have visited for sailing, water sports or a holiday.

Beyond its major attributes as a holiday place, it has the second largest natural harbour in the world. It is a busy port. It has major links with Cherbourg and, indeed, the Channel Islands, although, to develop and grow, we need a new bridge over Holes bay, off the A350, into Hamworthy, to give the port the opportunity to expand to meet the challenges of the future. That is now in the national roads programme, and it will be one of my priorities to ensure that the new Government maintain that programme and build the bridge for the benefit of the people of Poole.

Poole has the honour of being the headquarters of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, and it has a wide range of activities, such as financial services. It produces racing cars, power boats, slimming products, chemicals and periodicals. Anybody who has bought a packet of Ryvita or a copy of *Exchange and Mart* will have received a product from my constituency. It has many successful small businesses.

The key to that success are the good and enterprising people of Poole, but it is also the fact that there is a strong commitment locally to education, and that commitment is shown by the fact that local people have fought consistently over decades to maintain the grammar schools in the borough, which have a fine tradition of producing well-adjusted children who can get on in life.

The assisted places scheme has allowed nearly 40,000 children from less well-off families to get a better education in independent schools and to get on. As a nation, we rightly spend a lot of resources on those with learning difficulties. We do not always give the resources to those who have special talents and who can excel. The assisted places scheme was a small attempt to give greater support to those who are able and more talented. The Government's commitment to get rid of the scheme is misplaced and dogmatic. For example, the top 10 local education authorities at key stage 2 have larger class sizes than the bottom 10. The key point is that standards of teaching and the ability of teachers to communicate are sometimes far more important than purely class size.

Finally, I should like to thank all the Officers of the House for the courtesy with which they have greeted me as a new Member of Parliament. I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House who have helped me whenever I have had questions about what is going on in the Palace. It certainly is not easy to come into the House and pick up what is going on in the first few weeks.

8.43 pm

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): I congratulate the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) on his speech and on his stamina. Like me, he has been in his place for the past five hours and 15 minutes. I can assure hon. Members that I am conscious of the fact that mine is the 18th maiden speech of the day and, despite anything that my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) may say, one can have too much of a good thing, particularly at a quarter to 9 in the evening, even if it is a June evening. I shall therefore be brief.

First, I thank the people of Stevenage for electing me as their Member of Parliament. I am honoured to represent them, and promise to do my best to serve them in the future. Coincidentally, my predecessor, Tim Wood, also made his maiden speech during an education debate. Although I disagreed with most of what he said, I know that he was a hard-working and popular Member of the House, despite the fact that, for many years, he was a Whip. He fought the general election campaign honestly and fairly, concentrating on the issues and avoiding personalities. I salute him for that and wish him well.

Education also played a large part in the life of another of my predecessors, Shirley Williams, now Baroness Williams of Crosby, and in another place. However, she is still fondly referred to as "our Shirl" or "Shirl the girl" by many of her former constituents. I am glad that Stevenage is once more represented by a woman, even though as a grandmother I can hardly be called a girl any more.

I am even more glad that the election doubled the number of women in the House. That would have given Constance Lytton, an earlier resident of my constituency, a great deal of pleasure. She was a prominent suffragette and spent most of her life in the village of Knebworth, where, I am glad to say, she did not set fire to the local church. One of the first hunger strikers, she was force-fed in prison, which almost certainly led to her untimely death. Her family has given its name to one of Stevenage's main roads, but I believe that she deserves a more personal commemoration of her courage and commitment.

The constituency of Stevenage, which Shirley Williams described 33 years ago in her maiden speech as

"a microcosm of the new Britain"—[*Official Report*, 10 November 1964; Vol. 701, c. 880.],

covers the town of the same name, as well as the villages of Aston, Benington, Codicote, Knebworth and Walkern. The town of Stevenage grew out of a small Anglo-Saxon settlement known as Stithenaece, which means strong oak, and over the centuries it has proved an apt name for a place that has constantly had to adapt to change.

One of the greatest changes came in 1946, when the new Labour Government—like this one—fresh from their landslide victory, decided to tackle the chronic housing shortage in the overcrowded and bomb-damaged east end of London by building 11 new towns. Stevenage, with its population of 6,000, was the first. There was resistance, of course—most notably from a local novelist, named E. M. Forster, who had lived in Stevenage as a child and whose most famous work, "Howard's End", was based on Rook's Nest farm, in the old town.

Modern Stevenage has a population of more than 76,000. People came to the town to escape from the poverty and slums of the past. They found secure jobs,

decent homes and a clean environment in which to raise their children. That was 50 years ago. Now that dream, like the town centre, is threadbare and worn. Hope has been replaced by insecurity, and the valiant efforts of local councillors have proved ineffectual in the face of economic recession and central Government neglect.

Nowhere is that neglect more obvious than in our schools. All the hard work in the world cannot hide tatty buildings and tired teachers. Nothing can hide demoralised children. Some of the older children in Stevenage, most especially the older boys, seem to have given up. That is scarcely surprising in a town that has suffered the equivalent of five pit closures-worth of job losses in the past 11 years, with the downsizing of its largest employer, British Aerospace. It is even less surprising in a constituency that has the highest number of unemployed young men in the county.

There are jobs available, but, as local employers such as Glaxo Wellcome constantly tell me, most of our young men are simply not equipped to fill them. That is why this debate is so important, because it is about raising education standards. If we want to raise education standards, we have to start early in our children's lives.

Many of the young men and boys in my constituency started their school lives in large classes. Nineteen out of the 30 primary and infant schools in my constituency have classes of more than 30 for their five, six and seven-year-old pupils. Research in Britain and overseas overwhelmingly demonstrates the value of smaller class sizes to that group of children. If we are to fit our children for the jobs of the 21st century, we must give them a good start. Class sizes alone will not do that. Our children need high-quality nursery education, guaranteed literacy and numeracy standards, after-school clubs, holiday catch-up teams and, of course, good teachers.

That is the programme for which the people of this country voted overwhelmingly last month. It is the programme that we propose to deliver. The people of Stevenage know that, if it is delivered, their children will have a good chance of reading to their actual age or above by the time that they are 11. They also know that, if it is not delivered, their children will find it very hard, if not impossible, to catch up when they enter secondary school; indeed, many of them never will.

Assisted places do deliver excellence, but they deliver excellence for the few, not the many. One of the reasons why they deliver excellence is that—as so many of my hon. Friends have said time after time today—children in private schools are taught in smaller classes. Assisted places deliver excellence, at a price. In 1995-96, the taxpayers of Hertfordshire spent £2,403,000 on assisted places. Most of my constituents would have preferred that money to be spent on employing more teachers—120 teachers, in fact.

On 1 May, the people of Stevenage voted for a change. This time there will be no resistance to that change, not even from the novelist whom I know who lives in Stevenage old town. That is because, this time, the change will be a change for the better. I welcome it.

8.51 pm

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech on an issue that is so fraught for the area where I live that I fear that I may feel bound to strain a recent convention of the House relating to such occasions. As the 11th generation of my family to be elected, I hope that you will forgive me if, at any point in my speech, I allow myself to be bound by family tradition and put the needs of my constituents before the niceties of Parliament.

First, however, it gives me great pleasure to congratulate the hon. Member for Stevenage (Ms Follett) on her maiden speech. I listened to it with great interest, although it may prove something of a contrast with my own. Indeed, the town that the hon. Lady represents, being one of the newest in the country, is also something of a contrast with the one that I represent—an ancient town on the banks of the Wey.

Guildford, whose name derives from "the golden crossing", today presents a golden opportunity for trade, business and the arts, but above all for education. Guildford's state schools—grant-maintained and LEA-controlled—are a match for any in Britain. If the Government were right in saying that the best in state education would in time eliminate the need for private schools, that would surely be true in Guildford today. Yet in my constituency, more than almost anywhere else, parents—in some cases, nearly one in five—choose to pay to send their children to independent schools. Assisted places widen that choice for those who could not otherwise afford it.

As some hon. Members may know better than I, Guildford also boasts a first-rate college of law. On the Guildford campus, a thriving Surrey university has, over the past 15 years, built one of the most successful science parks in Europe. That is a testament to Tory enterprise economics, but also to the breadth and quality of Guildford's education system and the employees produced by that system.

One measure of the breadth of Guildford's business community is the generous sponsorship that has now been started for our famous Yvonne Arnaud theatre. Just as the theatre in Guildford has sponsored its share of west end stars, so the constituency seat has spawned its share of Westminster stars. Unlike our dear Speaker, none has starred in both the west end and Westminster, although my predecessor David Howell is remembered in the House for his starring role in the Foreign Affairs Select Committee and in Guildford for his sterling work as a constituency Member.

Just after David Howell's retirement was announced, having been Guildford's Member of Parliament for a good 30 years, he received a letter from a constituent. It began, "Dear Mr. Howell, I understand that you have taken over from Dick Nugent as my local Member of Parliament." It is typical of David Howell that, when telling me about the letter, he added, "I am sure that you will make yourself known rather sooner than I did."

In fact, nothing could be harder. In Guildford, Cranleigh, Bramley or any of the other Surrey villages that make my constituency such a pleasant place in which to live—as hon. Members on both sides of the House know only too well—I could not canvass anywhere without hearing of an example of my predecessor's attention and achievement on behalf of his constituents. He will surely make a rich contribution in another place.

David Howell himself started life with an assisted place—at Eton, although in the case of that college the funding of the assisted places was put on a more

[Mr. Nick St. Aubyn]

permanent basis during the government of Henry VI. That goes to show that the idea of assisted places is not some 1980s Thatcherite construct, but an age-old knowledge viaduct. The stream of talent pulled by the current of assisted places has, over time, benefited the country beyond measure. The kingly endowment that had funded Eton's assisted places for 500-odd years was recently valued at more than £100 million; yet if all that capital were liquidated at once it would not pay for the running of our state schools for one single day. Likewise, liquidating the new Conservative endowment of national assisted places may, according to Ministers, save £100 million by the year 2000, but the opportunities and the learning focus denied to some of our brightest children—which is the real cost of this measure—cannot be quantified.

What will the promised £100 million saving achieve? In my constituency, approximately 400 children have assisted places. The effect of the Bill in Guildford will be that all 400 places will disappear during this Parliament. It will be as though the new Government had sent their task force to our town to close one of our best state schools. Thanks to the long-standing emphasis placed on class sizes by Conservatives on Surrey county council, four out of five of our primary school classes already have fewer than 30 children. I have studied the Bill, and it contains no mechanism to give more money to help the other one in five classes.

Instead, to keep every primary class below 30, more children will be forced to accept their second or third choice of school. Some of the brighter children will be pushed into a higher year, and other children into a lower year. Forcing this narrow party promise through will have a negative effect, because class sizes in Guildford schools will increase.

Since 1509, Guildford has had its own Royal school. Our grammar school often achieves the best A-level rankings of any school in the country. Until 1977, the Royal grammar was a state school. Labour forced it to close its doors to state pupils, but the assisted places scheme has pushed that door ajar again. Today, more than one in 10 of its pupils benefit from that new endowment. One child in 10 benefit at Guildford High School for Girls, at St. Catherine's in Bramley and at many other excellent schools.

In a town that prides itself on its non-selective system for state schools, the flexibility that the assisted places scheme provides is valuable. For some children it is essential. One bright girl lives in the catchment area of a secondary school that teaches almost no A-levels. I met her parents. What could they do? This year, the answer could be an assisted place to give her the education that she needs to put her on her way to university: her primary school teachers maintain that she is fully capable of achieving that. But that will not be the answer next year if the Bill is passed. Whatever the Labour Government may think they are doing, they are slamming the door shut just as the previous Labour Government did.

We have heard from Ministers in the new Government that they want to raise standards in all schools to the very highest in the land, and we all want to do that. That is levelling up, but in a town where, I freely admit, standards are already up, this will be a levelling down. The lesson to be learned from the Bill is that, 20 years on, they may call Labour new, but it is the same old brew. They can rebottle classic Labour as Labour light, but if we have too much of it, the spirit level—in this Bill, I am afraid that it is the mean spirit level—is pushed over the limit.

This is my maiden speech, and however much the Bill will penalise gifted children in my constituency, when I wrote to Madam Speaker asking to take part in the debate I promised that I would be constructive, and I wish to end on a constructive note. I shall go even further and end on a most friendly note. I invite Ministers to visit me in Surrey to see how a Conservative education authority manages to achieve the primary school standards that the Government want within the constraints of the current budget. When they have seen that, perhaps they will scrap this misguided measure, which will deny talented children their best opportunity to serve not only themselves but our whole society.

9.5 pm

Ms Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) on his maiden speech but, as the House would expect, I do not agree with him. I disagree especially with his suggestion that bright kids are only at private schools. The thread of thought in the Opposition seems to be that bright kids do not go to state schools or do not do well in them. That is totally wrong. I went to many schools in this country because my father was in the forces. I attended a secondary modern and I was lucky enough to get O and A-levels and to go to university. Children do well in the state system.

I am pleased to make my maiden speech in a debate on education because the phasing out of the assisted places scheme and the investing of the millions of pounds in primary schools to reduce class sizes will be of enormous benefit to the children and families of the new constituency of Cleethorpes which I have the pleasure to represent.

The name Cleethorpes has a music-hall ring to it. It is a traditional British seaside resort with sun, fun, fish and chip shops, the pier and theme parks, but it is also much more. For example, we have Grimsby Town football club. The name of the constituency is misleading, because it centres on three towns on the banks of the Humber. Cleethorpes is basically part of the same urban area as Grimsby. Immingham is to the north of Grimsby and Barton-upon-Humber is at the southern end of the Humber bridge.

Immingham, with its booming port, oil refineries, power stations, chemical works and factories, is a growing, modern industrial area. Immage 2000 in Immingham is a multi-media, state-of-the-art studio—the first in the country. Marvellous educational work is being carried out there on community cable television.

Barton-upon-Humber is a splendid old market town with ancient buildings, many conservation areas and one of the oldest church towers in Britain. Surrounding those towns is the large rural hinterland of the Lincolnshire Wolds with rolling hills, peaceful villages, farms and windmills.

It would be difficult to find a constituency with such stark contrasts, but the people are the one unifying feature. They are canny and friendly and, as befits a constituency with a seaside resort, they love a good night out.

The area has been represented by some colourful characters. I cannot refer to the area as a constituency, because the towns within it have been in and out of a variety of constituencies. When Cleethorpes was part of Louth, it was represented by Jeffrey Archer—as he then was—and the constituency of Brigg and Cleethorpes was represented by my predecessor, Michael Brown, who was certainly an outspoken and interesting opponent.

Although we disagreed politically, in person Michael was always affable and we were united in a love of Cleethorpes, Immingham and Barton-upon-Humber. He also stood up for gay rights, for which I admire him, and refused to condemn me for being selected from a women-only shortlist. He said in many public debates that the Tory party had to consider something similar to redress the balance. On election night, he took defeat with great dignity, praised me for the campaign and wished me well in Parliament. I wish him well in his future, too.

When we consider class sizes in the area, we can see how the Bill will improve things a great deal. Cleethorpes, Immingham and Barton-upon-Humber used to be part of Humberside county council, but that was scrapped at great cost to the taxpayer. Even before the scrapping of the council, however, class sizes were giving great cause for concern. The figures that I have from the Library show that 680 classes in the Humberside county council area had 31 to 35 pupils and 117 classes had 36 to 40 pupils.

After the scrapping of Humberside, new unitary authorities were set up—again at great cost to the taxpayer. Now Cleethorpes is covered largely by North East Lincolnshire council and partly by North Lincolnshire council. Dwindling budgets, thanks to the former Government's cuts, and little or no reserves in the councils' bank have made protecting education a challenge. Despite their best efforts, class sizes are still growing and teachers are losing their jobs. Out of just over 100 unitary authorities, North East Lincolnshire is almost bottom of the league table in terms of pupil-teacher ratios.

Two stories will illustrate the crisis in education in the constituency and how diverting money from the assisted places scheme into primary schools will greatly benefit children. Queen Mary infants school in Cleethorpes has a dedicated staff. I visited the school during the election campaign. As the head teacher Jan Wharton explained, there are 13 children to one teacher in a nursery class, but after the Easter holiday those children go to a reception class with 37 children to one teacher. That is just not on.

At Barton county primary school in Barton-upon-Humber, head teacher Mike Simpson decided to sack himself to save the jobs of three teachers because of the financial crisis. Parents were devastated to lose such a teacher. Those are just two examples of the crisis faced by schools in my area: Surrey it is not.

All the parents to whom I spoke outside schools during the campaign, and for two years before that, were worried that because of increasing class sizes their children were not getting the attention that they deserved. Add to the equation crumbling school buildings and we can understand why those mums and dads are angry and disgusted that millions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been going into subsidising private schools through the assisted places scheme.

Our area is one of low wages and part-time work, where one in four non-pensioner households survive on benefits. People there are canny with their money and they want their taxes to benefit the majority of schools—not private schools. I welcome the Bill because I know, and the parents of the children there know, that to use taxpayers' money for the benefit of the majority of children rather than a select few makes common sense and is the only way to invest in our children's future and to raise standards. Phasing out assisted places and investing the money to reduce class sizes for all five, six and seven-year-olds was Labour's key election pledge: the people gave it their support, and we shall deliver it.

9.13 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): It is a great pleasure to be able to congratulate the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Ms McIsaac). She paid generous tribute to her predecessor, which I know will be appreciated throughout the House, and made an intelligent and thoughtful contribution to the debate, which augurs well. She will be listened to with great attention in the House.

Many hon. Members have made maiden speeches. I will refer to just one. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) said that it seemed to him as though 30 years had passed and that he was seeing the Home Secretary 30 years on. It seems to me as though 20 years have passed. Here we are, debating legislation at the start of a new Parliament, with a Labour Government who profess to be new—yet what do we find? They are revisiting devolution proposals that contributed to the collapse of the last Labour Government. As other hon. Members have said, the so-called new Labour Government are also revisiting exactly the sort of negative approach that they exhibited in the 1970s with the abolition of direct-grant schools.

I, like the Home Secretary, am a product of a direct grant school—in fact, the same direct grant school. However, I would be happy for the ladder of opportunity to be left for those who follow after, whereas Labour Members are willing for the ladder to be pulled up after them.

Labour Members talk a great deal about the many and the few. My first reaction when I heard that mantra, which is Labour's soundbite this evening, was to say, "But do the few not matter? Is this a tyranny of the majority?" Then, when I thought about it, I realised that Labour Members were missing the point. In fact, the assisted places scheme is designed for the many. It is designed to give opportunity to the many, so that parents who are not necessarily part of what Labour would call the privileged few, with the resources to participate in independent education if that is their choice, are able to have choice through the medium of the assisted places scheme.

I want to make a couple of points about how that choice exhibits itself. *[Interruption.]* In South Cambridgeshire, there are a substantial number of assisted places in four schools. In St. Mary's, many parents—in fact, a higher percentage than the 40 per cent. quoted—benefiting from assisted places have an income of under £10,000 a year—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Conversations should not be taking place in the Chamber while the hon. Gentleman is speaking.

Mr. Lansley: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

[Mr. Lansley]

Many parents on low incomes make the choice to send their children to St. Mary's because it is a single-sex girl's school with a Catholic orientation. I visited the school during my election campaign and asked the girls where they would go to school if their parents were not to have the choice available to them through the assisted places scheme. The answer was not their local community school, but—based upon their parents' choice—the Herts and Essex high school. That is a very fine school; indeed, my wife was a pupil there. But it does not mean that those children could go to school in their locality. That is an interesting reflection on rural areas, which brings me to an important second point.

In rural areas, where there is no access to the assisted places scheme and the extension of choice that that provides, because of the admission arrangements of schools there is often no choice at all. For some parents, such as those whom I mentioned, there are important examples of where it is necessary for them to be able to make that choice. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) referred to children from difficult homes whose parents take advantage of the assisted places scheme to help with boarding places.

There are serious flaws in the Bill—the black hole in finance and the difficulty of being able to relate the Government's rhetoric outside the House about how the Bill will reduce class sizes to the actual mechanics and minutiae of what savings will be delivered. The large gap is evident when we take account of assisted places pupils coming back into the maintained sector and the potential costs of capital provision to cater for them. Labour Members compare the revenue cost of children in the state sector with the total cost of fees payable in the independent sector, but they are not directly comparable.

There are difficulties with the Bill, not only in principle but in practice. In South Cambridgeshire, many children in assisted places attend preparatory schools that are linked with secondary schools and, therefore, teach students up to the age of 18. Unlike their preparatory school classmates, however, children in assisted places will not be offered an opportunity to complete their education, at 18, in essentially the same school and with the same children they knew in preparatory school. Similarly, the Bill's passage will mean that siblings will not be able to follow older brothers or sisters to the same school or receive the same education. Those are two very damaging practical consequences of the Bill's passage.

We are debating a poor Bill that is meant to achieve a bad purpose. It mentions choice, but, by denying diversity, it reduces or eliminates choice. Diversity and choice are two parts of the same coin. If one reduces diversity, one nullifies choice. Labour Members and the Government speak the language of choice and opportunity, but they would deny opportunity and reduce choice. On those grounds, I urge Opposition Members to oppose the Bill.

9.20 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I welcome the Minister for School Standards to the Treasury Bench. I hope that he will use his power as a Minister wisely, and more wisely than he has shown in his first attempt at government—the Education (Schools) Bill. He will receive Opposition support for measures to improve standards, but he will receive no comfort from Opposition Members if he continues in the same vein as that demonstrated by the Bill. As the former Secretary of State for Education and Employment said earlier in this debate, for Conservative Members the joy of being in opposition is that we no longer have to answer the questions. The Government must answer the questions, and, in his reply, I hope that the Minister will answer the many questions that have been asked in today's debate.

I should also like to congratulate all the hon. Members who spoke in the debate, especially those who have taken the plunge and delivered their maiden speech. We counted up the number of those making their maiden speeches today, and determined that the House has heard no fewer than 18 such speeches, including one from a retread, the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar).

We heard some good speeches from Labour Members, including those from the hon. Members for Don Valley (Ms Flint), for Worcester (Mr. Foster), for Loughborough (Mr. Reed), for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe), for Stevenage (Ms Follett), for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), for Reading, East (Ms Griffiths), for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ), and for Cleethorpes (Ms McIsaac). We also heard from the Liberal Democrats, in a speech by the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch). I may not agree with everything that those hon. Members said, but I acknowledge the variety of their backgrounds and the valuable contribution that they will undoubtedly make to the House.

We have also heard some first-class speeches from Conservative Members. Some of the speeches had us laughing; some made us despair, because of the Bill's effects; and some made us want to pack our bags to visit the delightful parts of the United Kingdom that were so eloquently described.

My hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) made an excellent speech. He is a home-grown boy, having attended Altrincham grammar school, and the constituents of Altrincham and Sale, West—whom I know well, and hold in great affection—are lucky to have such an able hon. Member representing them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) spoke fluently and without notes. She spoke of being confused with other hon. Members, although I do not think that that mistake will easily be made again after such a distinctive speech. The benefit of her experience will enhance the quality of our debate on many future occasions.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) said that he represents the constituency with the most beautiful name, if not the most beautiful Member. He did himself a great injustice, and he made a beautiful speech. He said that he felt that he was always in opposition. I can only say to him: one day, one day.

I was so glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) in the Chamber. I am sure that the Secretary of State—who stood against him at a previous general election—feels the same way. My hon. Friend now rightly takes his place as an hon. Member. He has many assisted places in his constituency; perhaps the Secretary of State should visit and face the schools and parents let down by the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) is also a home-grown boy, and he regaled us with the joys of his patch. He said that his constituency adapted well to change; I think that he has adapted very well to change and to his new role in this place, as was evident from the calibre of his maiden speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) seems very comfortable here. Indeed, he seems very familiar. When I first met him at the start of this term, I just said, "Hello," because I imagined that he had been here before. His speech proved that he will make a valuable contribution to the Chamber.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) told us that he is the 11th generation of his family to be elected to the House. I presume that that is something of a record. Perhaps Labour should note that the hereditary principle works well in this House. He painted a very vivid picture of the door of opportunity being slammed shut by this sad Bill.

Apart from 18 maiden speeches, we heard some seasoned and measured contributions from some old-timers. My hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), who shares a local education authority with me, made an excellent speech detailing the implications of the Bill for the schools themselves.

I must now mention the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), who I do not think is in his place. He still appears to be obsessed with class distinction. I was only too pleased to note that he still disagrees with his party but, in the light of his profanity in the Chamber, I am glad that he is in this place and not still educating some of our children.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) spoke passionately about the shortage of school places in his area in the maintained sector. Perhaps the Minister will deal with that point when he winds up the debate and explain where children who will no longer receive an assisted place will go to school in South Hams. Perhaps the Minister will also deal with the issue of the undisguised attack on single mothers, as it is the single mothers in South Hams who will be most affected by the abolition of assisted places.

I hesitate to say that the speech made by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) was well seasoned, but it was a speech that I had heard several times before. He has that in common with the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge). Indeed, both their speeches should probably be preserved in aspic.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) rightly attacked Labour's broken pledge and the letter sent by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). I trust that the Minister will deal directly with those issues.

The final speech that I shall mention is that of my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). It was not quite so seasoned but his second contribution in the new Parliament. He pointed out eloquently the iniquity of the Bill.

Conservative Members made powerful speeches, and we heard some predictable dogmatic speeches from Labour Members. This is the era of the soundbite and many were repeated several times. The one that I did not hear tonight was "education, education, education"—I believe that I have got the soundbite right. Education was to be the No. 1 priority for the new, shiny Government who would have us believe that they are going to create a brave new world in which every child will develop in an educational utopia, but what is their first move?

Did the Prime Minister choose education for the subject of his first keynote speech today? No. Are the Government giving more money to education? No. Are the Government employing more teachers? No. Their first move is to introduce a cheap, paltry little seven-clause Bill that is certainly not a new proposal but the culmination of an old vendetta against what they view as a privileged education.

The Bill introducing the assisted places scheme had its Second Reading on 5 November 1979, when it was opposed by the old Labour Member for Bedwelty—I think that some hon. Members know him as Neil. He made a promise then. It is a shame that he is not here today to see that promise honoured. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere rightly said that this was an old Labour measure. It certainly is. The hon. Member for Bedwelty said:

"it is our resolute proposal to terminate the assisted places scheme at the end of the academic year in which the next Labour Government are elected."

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, and we have done it.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Gentleman went on to add:

"I hope that that is a fair warning."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 1979; Vol. 973, c. 59.]

It was a fair warning indeed. The Secretary of State is right. It has taken only 18 years, but the promise has been kept. It is not a new promise, but proof that old Labour is alive and kicking and legislating today in a predictably vicious manner—new Labour, same old plot. This is a truly socialist measure, as the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said.

If that promise can be kept after 18 years, what of the other promise made in 1979? In the same speech, that hon. Gentleman went on to give a solemn pledge to use all his influence to secure a policy position that would bring about the abolition of the public school and other forms of private education. We have heard many speeches today attacking public schools. The Bill is not only an obvious attack on some of our most able pupils, but a thinly disguised assault on public schools. It could well be a foretaste of things to come.

The Government cannot claim that it is just old Labour that hates public schools: new Labour certainly does, too. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), made clear her hostility to public schools in Committee on the most recent Education Bill. At one point she said that, in her personal opinion, private education damages the state system. Will she be the Minister to preside over the fulfilment of the promise of the former hon. Member for Bedwelty?

Mr. Blunkett: She certainly will.

Mrs. Gillan: I take that as a firm pledge to abolish independent schools and private education. If Labour's promises can be so rapidly brought to the top of the agenda, how long before the rest of that pledge is fulfilled?

[Mrs. Gillan]

Quoting the Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Bath said that the independent sector will not go away, but it could be destroyed. The political will was obvious in the speeches by Labour Members today and in what the Secretary of State murmured from a sedentary position.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the hon. Lady confirm that the former Member for Buckingham, George Walden, has described the division in our education system as apartheid? Accepting and acknowledging that one thing damages another is not the same as threatening its demise, and the hon. Lady knows that. A little common sense might not be a bad thing in this debate. Some intelligence in the Chamber would edify the general debate about standards in education.

Mrs. Gillan: I shall come back to the word "apartheid". The Secretary of State has risen to the bait. He muttered from a sedentary position that he would let the hon. Member for Yardley supervise the destruction of independent schools.

Ms Estelle Morris: I had no intention of intervening on the hon. Lady, but she has gone too far. She was in Committee when I made the comments that she has quoted and she knows that before those remarks I said that we had no intention of abolishing the independent sector. We believe that the actions of some schools have an effect on other schools in the communities that they seek to serve. My comments that she has referred to in the House today were that and nothing more. She should not make suppositions beyond that in the Chamber or anywhere else. There has never been a threat from me or from anyone else on the Government Benches to abolish the independent sector. She should address the Bill, which is about giving opportunity to children, not about abolishing the independent sector.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Lady had better consult the record; I said that it was her personal opinion. I did not put words into the Secretary of State's mouth; he spoke from a sedentary position.

The indecent haste with which the Bill has entered the parliamentary timetable is deplorable. The Bill adds nothing to the education of children; instead, it takes something valuable away. The Government have trumpeted their belief in educational standards although they have a record of opposing everything we did to improve the performance of our state education system, whether it was testing, publishing results or the national curriculum.

Have the Government stopped for a second to draw breath and to look at the results achieved by assisted places pupils? No. They have not considered the results achieved by those pupils as worth a second glance. To the Government, those results are not considered valuable or worth while. The number of pupils in the state system who achieved five GCSEs at grades A to C stands at 41.7 per cent. The results from assisted places pupils are twice that, standing at 91.6 per cent., and the A-level results exceeded 95 per cent. Those results, however, have been unceremoniously ignored.

Surely a Government so genuinely concerned about standards would have waited a while before pulling the rug from under a future generation of bright children. Surely they would have allowed children to continue in what is self-evidently a system that is achieving good results for them. After all, the Government are conducting reviews, conducting consultations and producing White Papers right, left and centre. Why not here? Why do they not take a breath—take a step backwards—and examine the wealth in the assisted places scheme? If the Government had real confidence in their policies to improve school standards, the assisted places scheme would wither on the vine because parents would no longer want to send their children to private schools, but would send them to the local school because it could offer the same education.

But no, the Government are in a hurry. After 18 long years of brooding, they would rather take precipitate and vindictive action and abolish the scheme long before any further improvements can be made in the state sector—indeed, arguably before they can be made at all. This, their flagship education policy, is one of dogma and it contains a very dangerous principle. The principle is that it ensures that freedom of choice will be capable of being bought only by the wealthy and can never be aspired to by the less well-off. In one fell swoop, the Government are creating educational apartheid. There will be private schools for the wealthy who have the luxury of being able to buy choice and state schools or charity for everyone else. At a time when others are ending apartheid, the Labour Government are starting it in education and they should be ashamed.

There are almost 38,000 pupils in the scheme in Great Britain and almost 11,000 will enter the scheme in 1997 before it is snatched away by this legislation. Indeed, before the election, the Secretary of State callously agreed to my extending the scheme for one year for prep schools just to get more money into the scheme so that, when he abolished it, he would have more savings to make. Even so, the children involved are only 1 per cent. of the secondary school population and less than 20 per cent. of those attending private schools.

Those children, however, are receiving a first-class education that is best suited to their abilities and attributes. Labour needs to realise that not all children are the same; one style of education does not fit all pupils. The bottom line of the Bill is to remove one more choice of education style not from the wealthy, but often from the poorest in our society.

The Government produced two further soundbites as the reason for this mean little Bill. They said that they would use the savings to reduce class sizes and that they would govern for the many, not for the few. Surely by now they have found out that those soundbites carry little truth or accuracy and are merely gestures without substance.

Most of us would agree that, other things being equal, smaller class sizes could be advantageous, although the more discerning, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead, pointed out that the quality of the teacher is far more significant. We are deceived on two counts: first, on the financial outcome of abolition and, secondly, on the number of children involved. The savings from abolishing the scheme amount, so the Minister for School Standards said in a written answer, to £100 million, but the cost of educating 38,000 pupils in the state sector at an average of £2,800 a year each comes to £106 million alone. The Institute of Public Finance Ltd. estimates that the maximum accumulative savings by 2000 will come to only £34 million.

The Minister will argue that some parents will still pay for their children, but I doubt that, since 80 per cent. of pupils who take up assisted places come from homes with an income below the national average and many would be hard pressed to make the sacrifice of paying for their children's education.

The Government have pledged that they will bring down class sizes. That is only a half-truth. The truth is that smaller class sizes may be achievable in the next few years, not, as the Government would have us believe through their efforts or the abolition of assisted places, but because the birth rate is falling. The truth is that the birth rate has fallen since the start of the 1990s, and that is reflected in the number of children under 10 years old projected for 2001. Other than spite and an old grudge that the Labour party is bringing to fruition, there is even less reason to introduce the measure.

What do we see in the financial effects of the Bill? We see repeated the dubious promise to create savings to reduce class sizes. There is no guarantee of any significant savings, no mention of how savings will be identified, no estimate of how much they will amount to and no mention of how they will be ring-fenced to ensure that they are put to the stated use. Even worse, there is no recognition of the cost involved in educating the children affected in the state sector. The Bill is effectively uncosted.

The Bill will reduce choice in education, affect the poorest in our society, damage the variety of education available to our children, ensure that only the wealthy can buy private education, and create an educational apartheid. It is a penny-pinching proposal that does no justice to the children of the future. It is founded on class hatred from the 1970s and has no place in the House in the 1990s. I ask the House to reject it.

9.41 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): I thank the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) for her initial comments. I am sure that all Government Front Benchers would welcome her warm words.

A record number of maiden speeches have been made in this debate. As I understand it, about 18 have been made. At one time, it was rather like a Cook's tour—although given the present Foreign Secretary, that is perhaps not an appropriate term to use.

The hon. Members for Poole (Mr. Syms), for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton), for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn), for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) and for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) all spoke with a passion to defend and represent their constituents' interests—misguided perhaps, but clearly believing in the views that they expressed. It was delightful to hear an old timer, the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) make a thoughtful contribution to the debate.

Among those who spoke from the Liberal Benches, it was interesting to note that the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) is intending to set up an all-party cider club. I am sure that many hon. Members will be interested in joining it. I welcome the contribution made by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster)—who speaks for the Liberal Democrats on education—and his broad support for the Bill.

A number of my hon. Friends made highly significant maiden speeches. They are fully aware of the fact that one of the key pledges on which the Labour party stood for office and—I believe—one of the reasons for our overwhelming victory on 1 May was to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds with the money that we will receive from phasing out the assisted places scheme. My hon. Friends the Members for Reading, East (Ms Griffiths), for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ), for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe), for Worcester (Mr. Foster), for Stevenage (Ms Follett) and for Cleethorpes (Ms McIsaac) all articulated the view that that was one of the main reasons why we received such a vote on 1 May.

I was delighted to hear the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) because I was his twinned Member of Parliament during the election campaign and for a few months before hand. My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), who represents a neighbouring constituency to mine, also made his maiden speech. We share the same local education authority of North Tyneside, and I know that we will ensure that that LEA continues to deliver its current high quality education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Ms Flint) spoke for many when she referred to the sterling work of Martin Redmond in representing the interests of his Don Valley constituents in the House. A small fact of which my hon. Friend may not be aware is that it was in Don Valley that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State nearly drowned while learning to sail at Hadfield marina. I hope that that did not occur on a boat built by Swan Hunter in my former constituency. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend survived.

We also had a speech from one of what we call the retreads, my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar). I am delighted to welcome him back to the House. When Middlesbrough became a unitary authority I was invited to speak at the first meeting of the education committee. I know that it shares the Government's commitment to raising standards.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) spoke with his usual strength about the inequalities of educational opportunities in his inner-city constituency, which are made worse as a result of the assisted places scheme.

Perhaps above everything else the debate has highlighted the clear differences that exist between the major parties in the House—between a one-nation Government who are prepared to act decisively in the interests of all our children, and an Opposition defeated but still clinging to the belief that it is acceptable that a few should prosper at the expense of the many.

The Bill reflects a reordering of priorities—something that any Government must do. In so doing, we make no apology for putting the interests of 440,000 five, six and seven-year-olds, currently in classes of more than 30, before those of the 40,000 or so who would be in receipt of an assisted place at some future date.

Mrs. Gillan: If, as the hon. Gentleman has said, Labour intend to govern for the many and not the few, can he tell the House what will happen to the music and ballet scheme? Every year, £7 million is spent on that scheme

[Mrs. Gillan]

for a small number of children. The average expenditure per child is £12,750 a year. Do the Government plan to abolish that scheme because it is a form of assisted place that benefits the few and not the many?

Mr. Byers: I am delighted to be able to demonstrate in the clearest possible way that the Government will not be dominated by dogma but will adopt a practical, reasoned approach to such matters. We have always made it clear that specialist provision will not be under threat as a result of our policy. In fact, the ministerial team decided about two weeks ago that there would be no change to the music and ballet scheme. That is a clear demonstration of our commitment.

Three main issues were raised in the debate to which I wish to respond. The first was the question of choice. That was raised most persuasively by the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for South–West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard). She said that parental choice would be denied as a result of the phasing out of the assisted places scheme. She seems to have forgotten the document published in 1996 by her Government when she was in office. It was a guide to parents who were considering applying for an assisted place for their children. The guide is very clear. It says:

"schools select pupils according to their own rules. For most schools, children will need to take an entrance examination and go to an interview."

In the previous Government's own words, it is a question not of parental choice but of schools selecting. That is the reality behind the former Government's rhetoric about parental choice.

The second issue was that of class size. We were asked whether we could meet our commitment to reducing class size and about the educational benefit of such a policy. Class sizes rose substantially during the previous Government's tenure in office. In 1996 there were more than 300,000 more primary pupils than in 1992 in classes of more than 30.

We will make reductions progressively as we receive the money from the phasing out of the assisted places scheme. The clear difference between us and the Conservatives is that our priority will be investment in state education at the critical infant stage. Our respective positions reflect a profound difference of values.

We want to and will tackle the frustration and under-achievement caused by overcrowded classes. We will give priority to the 440,000 young children in England alone in classes of more than 30; but Conservative Members dwell on the 43,000 or so places under the assisted places scheme. We are certain that the money spent on the scheme would be put to better use in the state sector. The Bill ensures that we can make the earliest possible start on fulfilling our class size pledge.

The previous Government's plans provided for expenditure on the scheme for the current year of £140 million in England, £14 million in Scotland and £4.5 million in Wales. They had embarked on a substantial programme of expansion. They wanted to spend more than £200 million by the turn of the century on the assisted places scheme. We believe that we will be able to free up £100 million by 2000 to be used to reduce class size.

Some argue that class size does not matter—that it makes no difference to the quality of education. Try telling that to the parents who buy reduced class size by sending their children to a private school.

Mr. Forth: How then would the hon. Gentleman interpret the motivation of parents who strive to get their children into an already successful, over-subscribed school with relatively large classes? Why, even in the state sector, do parents opt for a good school, providing good education with large classes, and ignore the half-empty school down the road with small classes that performs very badly?

Mr. Byers: Labour Members recognise that there is a combination of factors that will raise standards. The main two are smaller class size and teacher performance. In government, the right hon. Gentleman's party did nothing to improve teacher performance and was prepared to accept under-achievement in our schools.

Mr. Hayes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Byers: I am sorry, but time does not allow it.

The chief inspector of schools said that, as far as he and Ofsted were concerned, a reduction of class size in the early years would make a real improvement in the quality of education.

The third, and perhaps the most important, issue that has been touched on is the view held by Conservative Members that bright children need the assisted places scheme to ensure that they receive a good education. In the words of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine),

"they need an escape route from the state system."

I prefer the analysis of a practitioner rather than a politician and agree with the view expressed by John Rae when, as headmaster of Westminster School, he said:

"the scheme is based on a false premise that an independent school is automatically a better place to educate a bright child."

The reality, which Conservative Members are not prepared to acknowledge, is that the assisted places scheme was the ultimate opt-out by an opt-out Government. It provided a subsidy to leave the system rather than taking positive action to tackle the underlying problems in our education system.

In that context, the assisted places scheme was simply a diversion and a distraction. It provided an excuse not to address the real issues facing our schools. It was one of the grounds for complacency under the previous Administration—a Government of drift who were not prepared to tackle the issues of underachievement and failure in our schools. This evening I give a commitment that the new Government will tackle under-achievement and failure with urgency and commitment—an approach that we did not see from the previous Conservative Government.

Nearly half our 11-year-olds do not reach the appropriate standard in English. What did the previous Government do to remedy that problem? Did they invest in support for literacy? No, they scrapped the reading recovery programme. Did they cut class sizes? No, they allowed 300,000 more primary pupils to be in classes of more than 30 in 1996 than in 1992. What the previous

Government did was to announce plans to double the number of assisted places, a proposal that would have affected less than 1 per cent. of the school population. However, in many respects that reflected the priorities of the previous Administration—an approach that took from the many to benefit the few.

That must, and will, change. It must change because education is vital to Britain's future. High standards and skills for life are the key to individual achievement, to social cohesion and to economic prosperity for our country. To achieve that, we must provide high-quality education for all our children.

The previous Government lacked ambition for our country and for our people. As a result, policies for a few were promoted at the expense of the many. Labour makes no apology for rejecting a system of education based on the philosophy that only a few can be winners and that as a result, the majority have to be losers. We believe that high-quality education can be made available to all our children. That is why the Bill is so important. It moves away from the Conservatives' fixation with the educational needs of a small elite. It reflects this Government's commitment to raise standards for all our children in all our schools, children who have been woefully neglected over the past 18 years by a Government that failed to address the real issues.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): What about Labour local authorities?

Mr. Byers: Much good practice has been promoted by Labour local education authorities. We will build on that in the years ahead.

The assisted places scheme was born out of dogma but tonight reason will triumph, as we give notice that its days are numbered. The reduction of class sizes through the phasing out of the assisted places scheme was one of our key pledges to the electorate. Now, just over a month after winning the general election and forming a Government, we shall deliver on that promise. By giving the Bill its Second Reading, we will take an important step towards honouring our commitment to reduce class size—a commitment that we gave to the electorate. We will only promise what we can deliver and, tonight, we will deliver in government. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 413, Noes 153.

Division No. 6] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Ms Clare
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim

Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steven
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John

Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward *(Old Bexley & Sidcup)*
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills),

That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Byers.*]

Question agreed to.

Committee tomorrow.

EDUCATION (SCHOOLS) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Education (Schools) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State under the Act.—[*Mr. Jamieson.*]

The House divided: Ayes 398, Noes 152.

Division No. 7] **[10.23 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dafis, Cynog
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie

Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mallon, Seamus
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steven
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan (Swansea W)
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*

Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward *(Old Bexley & Sidcup)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Business of the House

10.41 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a short business statement. The business for tomorrow will now be as follows:

TUESDAY 3 JUNE—At 3.30 pm, there will be consideration of an allocation of time motion relating to the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill, followed by consideration in Committee of the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill.

The business for the remainder of the week will be as previously announced.

Mr. Alastair Goodlad (Eddisbury): Is this not an example of a guillotine—the details of which have not yet been given to the House—that exemplifies the Government's high-handed disregard of the House and their blatant disdain for its views? Will the Leader of the House confirm that an offer was made through the usual channels to agree a timetable for the Bill? Does it not beggar belief that, before the Bill's Committee stage has even been started, the right hon. Lady proposes that the House can properly consider under a guillotine a Bill that will affect our constitution and have a fundamental effect on the future of every person in the United Kingdom? *[Interruption.]* "Of course it doesn't," says the Secretary of State for Scotland. The Bill will have a fundamental effect on the United Kingdom, but he says that it will not have an effect. We will note his comment, from a sedentary position, that it does not have an effect on this country.

Has the right hon. Lady considered the amendments that have been tabled? Does she not deduce from them that there will be much which right hon. and hon. Members of all parties, including her own, will wish to raise? Does she or does she not consider that their opinions are worth hearing? *[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State for Wales clearly believes that the opinions of the House are not worth hearing. The Secretary of State for Scotland is trying to shut him up, but the Secretary of State for Scotland also believes that they are not worth hearing.

Does the Leader of the House wish deliberately to cause the Bill to pass through the House unconsidered? The Lobby fodder do, but we know about the Lobby fodder. Has she considered that she has a duty to Members in all parts of the House to protect their rights? If so, will she confirm that her representations to her ministerial colleagues went unheeded and that, in effect, she lost the battle and has had to bow to the unelected forces—otherwise known as the secret seven, or is it the secret seventy—of the gauleiters who now run the Government and the Labour party?

Is it not ironic that the Government should choose on this, their first Bill, to move a guillotine motion and take an anti-democratic approach to a Bill, the purpose of which—*[Interruption.]* The Lobby fodder do not know what the purpose is. It is to allow some of the people of our country to have their say and yet to prevent the nation's elected representatives from considering it in

[Mr. Alastair Goodlad]

Parliament. Does the right hon. Lady realise that her credibility in the House and the House's co-operation with the Government have now been put in jeopardy?

Mrs. Taylor: The shadow Leader of the House first asked me to confirm that the Opposition had offered a timetable for the Bill. I cannot confirm that that is the case, because, had they done so, we would not have needed this timetable motion.

The right hon. Gentleman also said that the Bill would affect the constitution. Having seen the amendments that have been tabled, I think that many Conservative Members do not understand that it is not the devolution Bill but a Bill for a referendum, a test of opinion. There will be changes to the constitution only if the people of Scotland and Wales, who are to be consulted in the referendums, vote for them.

As for the time that has been allowed for the Bill, we had one day of the debate on the Queen's Speech to examine constitutional issues, and we offered a day and a half on Second Reading. It is a simple, straightforward Bill with only six clauses. I think that the right hon. Gentleman is misleading the House when he talks about its complexity. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I am sure that the right hon. Lady will withdraw and rephrase that sentence.

Mrs. Taylor: I apologise, Madam Speaker. The Bill is not complex. If the right hon. Gentleman has read it as such, I suggest that he looks at it again. It has six clauses and two schedules. The Government also have a clear mandate for it. I remind Conservative Members, most of whom did not come into the Chamber during the Second Reading debate, that they have not a single Scottish or Welsh Conservative Member. They have very little mandate on the issue.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the anger from the Conservatives seems synthetic, given that, as I understand from Tea Room rumours, they were offered more time for the Second Reading—time that they did not want to take?

Mrs. Taylor: I shall not confirm Tea Room rumours from the Dispatch Box, but they often have some substance. As for synthetic anger, I remind Conservative Members of the words of a previous Conservative Secretary of State for Education:

"Any debate on a timetable motion invariably causes a good deal of indignation from the Opposition, . . . usually found to be largely synthetic and totally unjustified."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1980; Vol. 977, c. 1210.]

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Does the Leader of the House agree that there was almost a good case this evening for a timetable motion on responses by the shadow Leader of the House? Does she also agree that for a party that guillotined the legislation on the Single European Act in 1986 to complain about a timetable motion from the outset is humbug and synthetic hypocrisy?

Will the Leader of the House take it as a useful precedent that there should be timetabling of Bills from the outset, not when the Government run into trouble in Committee? Does she agree that it would be a waste of the House's time to debate amendments such as amendment No. 189, which says:

"Voting in the referendum shall only take place during daylight hours"?

Given that the shadow Leader of the House has Shetland origins, will he tell us whether he wants the referendum to take place before or after the autumn equinox? That would have a great bearing on whether we have six hours or 18 hours in which to cast our votes.

Mrs. Taylor: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his choice of frivolous amendments. He could have chosen others to prove his point equally well. We have tried to ensure a measured approach to the debate in Committee. We want the debate paced to try to ensure that some of the main issues will be covered, rather than going through the frivolous amendments and then finding that vital issues might not be discussed.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): If the Opposition offered a timetable, would my right hon. Friend have any confidence that the Leader of the Opposition, whomever he or she may be, would have any control over the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) or any of his friends?

Mrs. Taylor: We understand the severe difficulties under which the official Opposition are operating. It must be difficult for the shadow Leader of the House, not being sure with whom he should discuss the issues.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills): Is it not the Labour Government's contention that this is the most important measure in this year's parliamentary calendar? We are dealing with issues that relate to the Union. There is a legitimate fear about that among Conservatives. As now posited, the referendum excludes the English or Scots living in England from expressing a view on the most precious Union of all to us.

On the Government's first serious measure, they are proposing a guillotining without testing whether the debate is frivolous or serious, yet it is fundamental to those such as me—born in Scotland, living in England and representing and English constituency—to be able to test the proposition. The motion should not be called tomorrow and we should stand by the proper procedures of the House on a constitutional matter.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman says that there are many people who were born in Scotland who represent English constituencies. Indeed there are and I am one of them; I have always followed this issue carefully.

The hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that the Bill is about whether the Union should continue to exist. The Bill is a test of opinion. There has been one test of opinion already during the general election and the result was very decisive. The Bill will allow for a very specific test of opinion. Opposition Members ought not to be so disdainful of the idea of consulting the people. One of the reasons why the Conservative party did so badly in Scotland and in Wales was that it was not willing to listen.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the greatest argument in favour

of expediting the Bill is that, in the previous referendum in 1979, we won? The majority of those voting in the referendum in Scotland voted for a Scottish Parliament. In the most recent general election, the Tory party—the party of the status quo—suffered a complete wipeout. The people of Scotland want constitutional change. We want a Scottish Parliament and that is what we expect the Government to deliver.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right. Conservative Members cannot have their arguments both ways. On occasions they say that there is no authority for devolution, but when we seek to provide that authority through a referendum, they still complain.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): We are seeing an arrogant, presidential style of government. Will the right hon. Lady tell her right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that he should not snub Her Majesty when the President of the United States visits and that he should not override the House of Commons in this high-handed way? Will she do her job as Leader of the House and stand up for the rights of the House on crucial constitutional matters?

Mrs. Taylor: I am not sure whether all the other contenders will have equal right to speak and equal time this evening. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman has done his party's fortunes in Scotland and in Wales any good by his attitude. We are not overriding the opportunities that will be available. We are making better use of the parliamentary time that is available, which is in the interests of the House.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): Given the recent opinion poll which shows that 75 per cent. of Scots favour the inclusion of a multi-option referendum, an idea with majority support in all the parties, does the Leader of the House accept the importance of allowing sufficient debating time for the issue? Can she guarantee that the substantive issues will be given adequate debating time?

Mrs. Taylor: I understand why the hon. Gentleman has strong feelings on the matter and I know that some of his hon. Friends share them.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Guarantee it.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position, "Guarantee it." If the House behaves sensibly, that debate could be guaranteed. If we do not see disruptive tactics, there will indeed be more time for the debate to which the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh) has referred. If we pace the debate, we can guarantee that the main issues will be given time—not perhaps as much as the hon. Gentleman would like—to be aired and that there will be time for decisions to be taken by the House. That is one reason why we are going down this path.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I am sure that the Leader of the House agrees with the dictum of Lord Acton that all power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. Did she expect it to happen, however, so early in this Parliament?

Mrs. Taylor: The Labour party was very specific during the election campaign about its intentions with regard to a referendum being held in Scotland and a referendum being held in Wales in the autumn. It is clear from looking at the amendments that some Conservative Members, not all of whom participated in our previous debate and many of whom were not present during it, have tabled them to frustrate debate. We want to facilitate debate.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Although I appreciate that the Leader of the House wants to facilitate debate, is it not always a Government's task to try to stymie debate and therefore move a guillotine motion? Speaking as one of those who have suffered in the past when the then Opposition joined the Government of the day in imposing a guillotine rather than allowing free debate, I ask: should not we guarantee real debate? We should not restrict the rights of Back Benchers to examine Government policies.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman should consider what has happened on other occasions and what could have happened during tomorrow's debate. We could have started the debate with whatever amendment happened to be top of the list and spent all evening and all night voting on the more minor amendments—some of the amendments that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has called frivolous. We are trying to make better use of parliamentary time by trying to ensure that there are debates on the key issues that have been indicated to us.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): A limited number of us were here in the 1970s, when devolution for Wales and Scotland was debated. May I remind the House how seriously hon. Members on both sides of the House took those debates? Those debates were long and detailed. The House took them extremely seriously because they were of great constitutional importance.

I look to you, Madam Speaker, to protect the interests of Back Benchers on both sides of the House. Should a guillotine motion be moved without detail and before the Committee stage of an essential constitutional Bill—essential from the Government's point of view, very damaging from the Opposition's point of view—has begun?

I ask the right hon. Lady to take account of those of us who have been here a number of years and who are deeply concerned about the Union of the United Kingdom. The matter is being introduced the wrong way round. We should see what the Bills on devolution are about before we start discussing the referendum.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the devolution debates in the 1970s. I, too, was in the House during those years and remember the hours spent on them—though I have to say that very often the debates were dominated by a relatively small number of hon. Members. He says that the Bill is very important. In that case, I wish that the Opposition Benches had not been so empty on Second Reading.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the right hon. Lady recall that, during the business statement that she made on 22 May—the day the House rose for the recess—I asked her directly and clearly whether she intended to move a timetable motion. She gave no

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

indication that she was going to do so. Can she explain why? Can she reconcile her attitude with the speech that she made later that very day, when she talked about the House having the opportunity to call the Executive to account?

Mrs. Taylor: I think that I was very wise not to give any indication on 22 May because at that stage we had not had any indication of how Opposition Members would be treating the Bill. The simple fact is that 250 amendments, 21 new clauses and 12 new schedules have been moved to a Bill which has only six clauses. What I said later that day in the debate on modernisation proves the point. I said that some Bills have a highly political content on which there is no possibility of agreement across the Floor of the House and, on that basis, the Government must act to get their legislation through.

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): This is a matter of the utmost importance to hon. Members on both sides of the House. Those on the Government Benches may find that the time comes when they also have a great interest in such a procedure. Does the Leader of the House acknowledge what all her predecessors have acknowledged: that it is her responsibility to look after both sides of the House and not just her own side? If she does, in my experience it is completely novel that such a motion should be moved before the Committee stage of a Bill has even begun. In all my time in the House, I cannot recollect that ever happening before.

Nor do I think it advisable that it should happen particularly in this case because, as has already been pointed out, the Bill is to introduce a referendum on another matter that is not yet embodied in parliamentary draft, let alone approved by the House as a matter on which there should be a referendum. Therefore, I must ask the Leader of the House to give fresh consideration to this because it is a completely new introduction into procedure in the House and not one—

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The right hon. Gentleman did it.

Sir Edward Heath: No, I never did it.

The change is not one which I believe that the House as a whole, on reflection, would wish to consider to be a precedent for future action.

Mrs. Taylor: The right hon. Gentleman says that there might be a time when we are interested in such procedures. I must tell him that, after 18 years of watching the former Government introduce guillotines, we have taken a great deal of interest in that procedure. He asked me directly whether I believed that the Leader of the House has responsibility to all parts of the House. I say to that, "Yes, I do." I strongly believe that. That is one of the reasons why I am so glad that the minority parties agree with the procedure that we are adopting.

Mr. Skinner: Does my right hon. Friend recall that in 1971 the then Prime Minister, the present Father of the House, whose memory is obviously beginning to fade a little, introduced a guillotine on the Industrial Relations Bill? That was one of the most controversial Bills that came before the House at that time. The net result was, as he might now recall, that we used to have to vote night after night in the Lobby because he and his Tory Members of Parliament guillotined that Bill. As a result, we had to fight tooth and nail even to make a speech on it.

After all that turmoil, the then Prime Minister decided to put the Industrial Relations Act on the back boiler. It fell into disuse within two years of being passed by Parliament. It is some cheek for the Father of the House to make an intervention now. It is a wonder that the Tories can keep their faces straight when they make such speeches.

Mrs. Taylor: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is a wonder that some people can keep their faces straight when they make their comments. My memory does not go back quite as far as his, but I accept what he says about 1971.

On many occasions, we have seen night after night of voting with little discussion of the relevant Bill. There are many examples of the previous Government introducing guillotines at all stages of legislation and, as a result, the time of the House has been wasted and there has been very little constructive debate.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the right hon. Lady accept what is said in "Erskine May" on the question of guillotines? It states:

"They may be regarded as the extreme limit to which procedure goes in affirming the rights of the majority at the expense of the minorities of the House".

Does the right hon. Lady accept that what she is doing is no more than exercising the assumed rights of an elective dictatorship? Does she not also accept that this Bill is classified as what is known as a first-class constitutional Bill and, therefore, that the precedents that apply in this case, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) has made quite clear, are not applicable? The fact is that this represents a novel use of the guillotine in relation to a first-class constitutional Bill. If she disagrees with me, will she give me an indication of the precedent on which she relies?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman has mentioned timetables in general. May I tell him that, when we debated timetabling and the Jopling reforms, we were of course in favour of voluntary agreements to reach a timetable. But I know that the hon. Gentleman's party would have found it very difficult to reach a voluntary agreement because he would probably not have honoured it.

With respect to what I have said in the past about timetabling Bills, the last time that I spoke on a guillotine motion—a Tory guillotine—I accepted that guillotines had a part to play in our constitution.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, while it is proper to be sensitive to the rights of the House, the Bill is to give rights to the people of Scotland and Wales? Far from the Government being an elective dictatorship, any filibustering on the Bill would deny to the people of Scotland and Wales something that was pledged plainly in a manifesto that led to a clearance from both those countries of any Conservative Members who might oppose it.

Mrs. Taylor: My right hon. Friend is right. That is why Conservative Members seem unable to understand the

nature of the Bill, which does not change the constitution but allows consultation with the people of Scotland and Wales. It allows us to fulfil a clear manifesto commitment in which we defined the specific provisions that we would introduce and, indeed, the time scale.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It needs to be suggested that the Leader of the House has, deliberately or otherwise, misled the House.

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made a very serious statement. I must ask him to withdraw it.

Mr. Gale: No.

Madam Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman is refusing to withdraw the statement that he has just made about the right hon. Lady misleading the House—*[Interruption.]* Order. Who said it was justified? I will deal this matter, and I will also deal with the hon. Member who said that it was justified. Let me deal first with the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale). If he refuses to withdraw, my only alternative is to ask him to withdraw for the remainder of this day's sitting, under the Standing Order.

Mr. Gale: What I said—and I must repeat it—was clearly that, either deliberately or otherwise, the Leader of the House has misled the House. She has given the House the impression that this is not setting a precedent, and—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman can say that the right hon. Lady has given the House an impression. If he is saying that, he should make it very clear to me. Otherwise, I will use the Standing Order.

Mr. Gale: The right hon. Lady has given the House the impression, correctly or incorrectly, that the measure tonight is not setting a precedent. It is my understanding, as a Back Bencher who has been in the House for 14 years, that it is a precedent.

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Gale: I would ask you, Madam Speaker, and your Clerks, to clarify whether this is a novel experience and a precedent.

Madam Speaker: Order. It is not a precedent. Standing Orders allow for guillotines. Let us get on with it. Who said that it was justified? I would caution him not to use such words in future.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid–Bedfordshire): I did not say that it was justified. I said that perhaps he could justify it.

Madam Speaker: No, you did not. I heard the hon. Gentleman clearly.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Has the Leader of the House missed the point, which is quite simply that the Bill is a class A constitutional Bill in its own right? There are so many amendments because the detail that follows the Bill in devolution legislation is so important and remains unresolved. The Government want to force it through and get a vote in Scotland and Wales so that subsequently they can ram through their devolution legislation on a guillotine as well, on the basis that we have no right to debate it. The Leader of the House plans to guillotine the Bill, but can she give the House an undertaking that none of the devolution legislation will be guillotined?

Mrs. Taylor: The timetable motion is a response to the attitude of Conservative Members who did not even participate in the debate on Second Reading. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Bill's constitutional nature. The Bill has one simple purpose, and that is to consult the people of Scotland and Wales by a referendum.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): Has not the Leader of the House said that, although the Bill is short and the amendments are numerous, it is a measure which is worthy of a guillotine because the amendments are, in her words, frivolous? Is it not inappropriate for her to make a value judgment on amendments? Is it not for the House as a whole, after due debate, to decide the merit or otherwise of amendments? Is she not seriously endangering her authority and position as custodian of the rights of the House as a whole in taking that partisan view and thereby pre-empting an important Committee stage on the Floor?

Mrs. Taylor: Every guillotine is a value judgment, and is needed only when there is not agreement between the two sides of the House. I remind the hon. Gentleman that some parties in the House have not been hostile to the decision because they realise that it guarantees some of the debates that they think are essential.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): Does the right hon. Lady not understand that her monstrously arrogant decision shows that she is utterly contemptuous of the views of the House and is as keen to stifle debate here as the Prime Minister is to stifle it in the ranks of the Labour party?

Mrs. Taylor: We are trying to prevent men behaving badly and get a proper debate

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Does the right hon. Lady agree that 136 amendments and new clauses—I have a copy of them with me—have been selected for debate? Does she agree that her motion will make sure that the majority of them will never be discussed at all? Is it not tragic that Governments of both parties have presented complicated Bills that contain many proposals that when considered carefully turn out to be a load of rubbish, as happened with the Single European Act, which I voted against? Is there not a danger that we will not have the opportunity to consider this issue carefully?

Mr. Canavan: The hon. Gentleman was kicked out of Scotland by the people of Scotland.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does she—and the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), who got it so wrong

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

over the last such Bill—agree that the tragedy of devolution is that the Government, like the previous Labour Government, are supporting something that they know to be against the interests of Scotland because they think that it will defend them against the Scottish National party?

Mrs. Taylor: I know that the hon. Gentleman has taken a keen interest in this issue over many years and, unlike some Conservative Members who have spoken, he participated in the debate. I disagree with him when he implies that every one of those 136 amendments would have had the sort of scrutiny that he suggests had we not decided to get proper debates on certain groupings. We are endeavouring to ensure that the main issues that require consideration find time for debate in the House. However, he is being incredibly arrogant when he says that in promoting devolution we are promoting something that we know to be against the interests of Scotland. This Bill gives the people of Scotland and Wales the chance to make the decision.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Does not the Leader of the House appreciate that the people of this country will be stunned at the Government's breathtaking arrogance in introducing a guillotine procedure even before Committee stage has begun? What am I to say to my constituents, the people of Ribble Valley? Some of them are Welsh, like me, and will have no say in that referendum. Some are Scottish and live in Ribble Valley, but will have no say in that referendum. The vast majority are English, but will be asked to pick up the tab for that referendum. Surely, the Leader of the House should recognise that denying them their say means that, at least, she should not deny their Member of Parliament in the House of Commons the right to speak at length on the issues involved in the referendum debate.

Mrs. Taylor: I am not sure, but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman spoke in the debate on Second Reading, although I am sure that he has told his constituents his view. *[Interruption.]* I am asked what that has to do with it. It is astounding that there is such peculiar indignation coming from the Opposition Benches, from people who showed no interest at all on Second Reading. The hon. Gentleman says that people will be stunned by the guillotine that we are suggesting; I think that people are stunned by many of our procedures, which see this House sitting through the night to no good effect.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Just as a matter of interest, can my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House tell us how many of those Conservative Members who are protesting now protested against the guillotines on highly controversial legislation, such as the Single European Act, the poll tax and many other measures that were strenuously opposed by Labour during the 18 years in opposition? Have we not seen tonight the height of hypocrisy from Conservative Members who never once protested against the guillotine motions of their own Government?

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right. The list of the guillotine motions produced by the previous Government runs to several pages and I do not think that any Conservative Member voted against any of them.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Just a few weeks into the new Parliament, are we not witnessing a quite disturbing situation—a new Government who find it impossible to resist the undoubted temptation presented by a large majority to treat this House with increasing levity?

We have already had the unilateral decision to change the arrangements for Prime Minister's Questions, reducing from six to three the number of questions a week that the Leader of the Opposition can ask the Prime Minister. We have already had a very important announcement about giving the Bank of England operational independence being made outside this place, and we were simply presented with a fait accompli.

Now, we have the double event of a Bill being guillotined which is, first, a major constitutional Bill and, secondly, one that has not even started its Committee proceedings. Will the right hon. Lady—even at this late hour—think again before fundamental damage is done to our parliamentary system, which all of us on both sides of the House who are devoted to this country's parliamentary system will come to regret and to rue?

Mrs. Taylor: I do not think that this decision has the implications suggested by the hon. Gentleman. This is not a major constitutional Bill—it is a Bill allowing for the consultation procedure.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The Leader of the House has just said that the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill is not a major constitutional Bill. Is it not absolutely crystal clear from "Erskine May" and, indeed, from your own ruling that this could not possibly be described as anything other than a major constitutional Bill?

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The House must examine the Bill as it comes before it, as it is doing now and as it will do tomorrow.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Can the Leader of the House answer the question that she has so far avoided? What is the precedent for guillotining a constitutional Bill in the House before Committee stage has even begun? Many people in the House tonight will feel that she has betrayed the trust put in her position, which is to defend the interests of the House against an Executive who seem to believe that if a measure is in their manifesto, it does not have to be debated in the House.

Mrs. Taylor: It is basic common sense to adopt the approach that we are suggesting, not least because, if we did not take steps to ensure that there was a referendum in Scotland and one in Wales in the autumn, we would be breaking a manifesto commitment.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): I can understand why the right hon. Lady is so terrified of even brief debate

on amendments. Clearly, it is entirely a matter for her if she wants to treat Government Back-Bench Members with contempt, but will she tell us how she justifies treating the people and democracy itself with contempt?

Mrs. Taylor: The Bill is about democracy; it is about consulting the people of Scotland and Wales.

Mr. John Butterfill: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. The right hon. Lady is justifying the proposed guillotine motion by saying that some of the amendments that have been tabled are frivolous. Surely that is your decision. You decide which amendments will be called for debate.

Madam Speaker: My Chairman of Ways and Means decides.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will the Leader of the House tell me when such a Bill was guillotined before consideration in Committee? Is it her view, as it appears to be from what she has said already, that only those such as myself who participated in the constitutional debate on a Friday and spoke on Second Reading may take any interest in Second Reading?

Mrs. Taylor: I did not say that. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman participated as he describes. I was comparing the synthetic debate this evening with the amount of real interest that was shown on Second Reading.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. We must now move on to the Northern Ireland business.

Dr. Fox: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Leader of the House, who is supposed to represent the interests of Back-Bench Members on both sides of the House, to fail to answer questions on precedent in the Chamber on repeated occasions, as we have seen this evening?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): What is said from the Government Front Bench is entirely a matter for Ministers and not for the Chair.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Leader of the House to timetable business during the Conservative party's internal elections? As I remember Second Reading, there were only three Conservative Members present in the Chamber because the debate took place during the 1922 Committee elections. If the Leader of the House had timetabled consideration in Committee for the next instalment in the Tory party leadership election, she might not have needed a guillotine motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Like many things that I have heard in the House, that is not a matter for the Chair.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During the 38 years that I have sat in this place, I have never seen a Minister, in the middle of answering questions, walk out of the Chamber. Unless the right hon. Lady has been taken unwell, which we would all much regret, it seems to me an act of the grossest discourtesy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In fact, Madam Speaker had determined that we move on to the next business. There was not, therefore, any question of discourtesy from the Government Front Bench.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Leader of the House made it clear that she did not think that the Bill was a first-order constitutional measure. Why, then, is it being taken on the Floor of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There are other such measures that are taken on the Floor of the House, as the Order Paper for this week already shows.

Mr. Wilshire: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Leader of the House could not have been other than aware that the issue of a guillotine motion was still being raised on points of order, despite what Madam Speaker said. Is it not therefore a matter of gross contempt towards us all for the right hon. Lady to walk out of the Chamber and ignore what we are saying?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Madam Speaker had decided that we were moving on to the next business, and certain right hon. and hon. Members acted on that fact.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you, as the Chairman of Ways and Means, are responsible for the selection of amendments, may I ask you whether it is normal practice on an important constitutional Bill for the Chairman of Ways and Means to select frivolous amendments?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that there may be a more appropriate time to discuss whether the amendments that have been selected are appropriate.

Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations)

11.29 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 (Revival of Section 3) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 15th May, be approved.

Before I move on to the substance of my comments, I welcome to his place the current, temporary Conservative spokesman on Northern Ireland. In the previous Parliament, we maintained a bipartisan approach to policy on Northern Ireland, and I hope very much that we shall be able to do so again in this Parliament. I look forward to any views that he might express on this subject.

As well as welcoming the many new hon. Members, I particularly welcome those from Northern Ireland—the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson), who replaces the much missed Sir James Molyneaux, from whom, fortunately, we shall be able to hear in future in the House of Lords, and the hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson). We look forward very much to working with them both.

Meanwhile, the House will be a different place without the presence of Rev. William McCrea. Dr. Joe Hendron will also be missed. I know that he has left many friends in the House. It is also right that I pay tribute to one other absent face, that of Sir Patrick Mayhew, who will also be found in the other place. He worked with a dedication that would have brought many others close to exhaustion for the interests of Northern Ireland as he saw them, and he did so without any hope of personal advantage, knowing that the position of Secretary of State was likely to be his last in government. I believe that Northern Ireland owes him a debt. It was under his stewardship that the Downing street declaration and the framework document were agreed, two milestones on the path to where we are today.

We are reviving the forum now because the talks, which are the centrepiece of the process, are to reopen tomorrow. So let me first consider the process as a whole.

The talks first met last June. The forum followed several days later. High hopes rode on the process. Had Northern Ireland really turned a corner? For some, the answer was no, and had been since the IRA ceasefire tragically and cruelly ended in February last year. That view was compounded just a few days after the talks started, when the IRA planted a bomb that devastated the centre of Manchester. However, to many people in Northern Ireland, the talks nevertheless held out great promise.

The participants in the talks worked hard, and they have achievements to their credit, such as the rules of procedure, and a measure of agreement—formal and informal—on agendas. However, they did not progress into the negotiations on the three strands covering relationships within Northern Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic and between Westminster and Dublin, because they failed to agree on the issue of decommissioning, although in that case, too, a measure of agreement was reached on important mechanisms that would be needed. The imminence of the elections here was an increasing drag on the ability of the talks to function, and eventually the conclusion was reached that nothing further could be achieved in advance of the elections.

Now that the elections are out of the way, it is vital that we make the greatest effort to move the political process forward. The whole Government, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister recently set out so clearly and comprehensively, are determined to bring new impetus and new energy into the process. We want to see the talks move forward to consider all the key issues that are important to people in Northern Ireland. We have no illusions that that will be a simple matter, and we do not have any delusions of possessing any wisdom, superior or otherwise, about how to deal with those issues, but I can assure the House that we shall work hard with the people of Northern Ireland to find a way through.

The present talks offer a great opportunity for Northern Ireland, and that will not last indefinitely. Early progress is needed, which means addressing the issue of decommissioning. I appreciate all the sensitivities that the question attracts, but we must try to find a way through the problems—which I believe, in practical terms, can be only on the basis of the formula proposed by Senator Mitchell and his colleagues, involving some decommissioning during negotiations.

I hope that we can approach the debate in a new way. Much has changed since 5 March. Electoral uncertainties, in the United Kingdom at least, are out of the way. We as a Government have done all that we can to provide reassurance and clarity in regard to our policy. We have shown that we are a "what you see is what you get" Government. In my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's speech in Belfast on 16 May, we set out the fundamentals clearly. In particular, my right hon. Friend made clear our total commitment to the principle of consent: Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom unless there is clear and formal consent to the contrary. But he also made it clear that we seek a Northern Ireland in which all traditions can feel equally comfortable, and to which they can give allegiance.

I believe that the feeling that led the people of Great Britain to vote so overwhelmingly for change—a desire for a modern Britain, with old conflicts put behind us—is also very evident in Northern Ireland. I believe that there is a widespread wish to resolve old differences, to put an end to violence and to construct a confident new future that is both co-operative and tolerant.

Let me touch briefly on the role of Sinn Fein. We want Sinn Fein to be in the political process; but negotiations are inconceivable if one of the parties comes with its mandate backed up by the threat of armed force, which is why an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire, evidenced in word and deed, is essential to Sinn Fein's entry. That is now the view overwhelmingly held in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, and also by those around the world—such as the President of the United States—who follow the issue with interest. The republican movement should renounce violence unequivocally. We have made it absolutely clear that, if it does not, talks will proceed without its members.

As I have just spoken of the President of the United States, let me put on record our gratitude for the help and co-operation that we have received from the United States Administration. It has been crucially important to the Northern Ireland peace process. We are grateful not just to Senator Mitchell for chairing the talks, but to Mr. Holkeri and John de Chastelain, who acted as vice-chairs. We are also grateful for the help that many US business people have given Northern Ireland. They

have put their money where their mouths are and have delivered jobs and investment, which is helpful to the process.

That is the background to tonight's debate. The draft order would bring back into existence the forum that was established by the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996. The forum is not technically part of the talks themselves. It is open to all the 110 delegates returned in the elections of May last year. It was suspended by order in March, following debates here and in another place. Because the multi-party talks were suspended for the time being, the forum had to be suspended too.

Before the general election, during a debate in the House, I said that, if I were in a position to introduce the order, I would trust that

"the central objective of discussing issues relevant to the promotion of dialogue and understanding in Northern Ireland will be at the forefront of people's minds when they begin again to take part in the forum debates."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1997; Vol. 292, c. 999.]

I repeat that call tonight.

We moved as quickly as we could to restore the forum. Its first meeting in 1996 came after the talks had opened, and we envisaged the same ordering of events now. The order will come into effect tomorrow, as the talks open. The forum will be legally free to meet once their session is over for the week. I know that some think that that should have happened sooner, but I believe that the outcome, as well as being practically inevitable, is right in principle.

Views differ about the work of the forum so far. Although it has investigated a range of issues of current concern in Northern Ireland and has produced some useful and interesting reports, the interests of the whole community are best served when it concentrates on its principal remit, which is the promotion of dialogue and understanding in Northern Ireland.

I believe that the forum could become more positive if all the parties entitled to seats were to take them. I am conscious of the reasons that led the Social Democratic and Labour party members to leave after the events of Drumcree last year. I also appreciate that what has, at times, been said in the forum would not readily attract them back, and has upset and angered members present. Nevertheless, it provides an opportunity to improve the climate in which the search for an over-arching political settlement goes on through the pursuit of new thinking in areas that bear on political advance by delegates from all parts of the community.

The role that is conferred on the forum is a useful one.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm her commitment to the Mitchell principles on decommissioning? It should take place in parallel, and should not be a precondition to Sinn Fein or any other organisation participating in negotiations.

Marjorie Mowlam: I implied, and I shall make it clear now, that we believe, as did the previous Government, that our handling of the difficult issue of decommissioning should be in line with the Mitchell principles. In articles 34 and 35 of his report, Senator Mitchell said that it was not necessary for decommissioning to take place before talks started or for it to wait to the very end, but that it should happen in parallel, while the talks took place. That confirms the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan). That is our position, and that of the previous Government, and we shall work hard to achieve that.

There is some agreement on that issue, but we would be misleading ourselves if we believed that there was close agreement. We and the Irish Government are working towards achieving such agreement, and I hope that we shall have a chance to do so with the other parties when the talks open tomorrow.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the right hon. Lady confirm that decommissioning is not one of the Mitchell principles? It was part of the proposals and not one of the principles, which we accepted.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. He is right, and I should have clarified that point. There must be an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire before people can enter the talks, and an agreement to the six Mitchell principles. All parties must make a commitment to democratic and non-violent ways forward. We cannot expect anyone to sit in talks with people who are negotiating while using violence when it suits them. There must be that commitment if people are to have faith in the ceasefire and to negotiate. The decommissioning issue has delayed the talks for many months, as my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West knows.

We must get some momentum into the process when the talks start again tomorrow. Hon. Members who are present tonight and those who are unable to be with us because they are in South Africa have sat for many months trying to reach agreement, and have so far failed. We together with Senator Mitchell, the Irish Government and participants from all the parties must make a strong, concerted effort to get some impetus on decommissioning, or the process will be held up again.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): The Secretary of State rightly said that the ceasefire was the important consideration, and she referred to words and deeds. We are waiting for the words from Sinn Fein, and then the deeds must be verified. It may be fruitful to consider establishing a publicly funded, independent body to monitor events in the period leading up to Sinn Fein entering talks. That would ensure that people from both communities could present examples of what they thought were violations of ceasefire principles, and those could be checked and reported to the House. Such a procedure could be fruitful in the context of laying down terms for what the deeds have to be after the words have been pronounced.

Marjorie Mowlam: I understand the guts of what my hon. Friend is trying to achieve. I agree with the principle of where he is trying to go. However, if we waited while another independent body was set up and for a ceasefire to enable Sinn Fein to take part in the talks and to agree to the six Mitchell principles, we would be setting different conditions from those that are set for loyalist paramilitaries. In that sense, we must treat people equally and fairly. That is not to undermine my hon. Friend's basic point, that we must be sure that the words and deeds

[Marjorie Mowlam]

are such that people can trust in them. If that is not the case, there will not be the opportunity for people to join in the talks process.

I have said that if the words are strong, they will make the deeds have lesser weight. If people said tomorrow, "This is the end of the war; the war is over," the deeds would be of less importance. However, if the words were the same as they have been on earlier occasions, we would need the deeds, and we have said that the deeds will be judged by me. I shall look carefully at them in the round so as to take into account all the different aspects. I shall do that fairly and honestly.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): As someone who will be in those talks tomorrow morning and who has heard the Secretary of State speaking about the Mitchell principles, may I ask her for an opinion on whether all the other parties who will be sitting around the table in the talks in Castle Buildings tomorrow are adhering to the same Mitchell principles that she has enunciated?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for a difficult question. It is a difficult judgment to call. There is no doubt that, faced with the violence over the weekend, and particularly the case of the RUC man who was taken out of a pub and kicked to death in Ballymoney, it is difficult to be sure that both sides are being treated equally. The difficulty is that we have to be sure of our facts before we act. From the evidence that has been provided to me up to now, I believe that the groups related to the loyalist groups in the talks, the Combined Loyalist Military Command, have not been associated with the violence. We assume from the evidence that we have received that other groups are related to that violence.

It would not be unfair to say to the hon. Gentleman that I am considering proscribing some of those groups. We need to wait for tomorrow's talks, because it is a matter for consideration in the talks process, as the hon. Gentleman knows because he has been in the talks more than most. The foundation of the talks procedure is that someone has to make a formal complaint. It is ultimately up to the two Governments, but I should like to wait for more evidence, see whether the parties have moved together and look at the evidence that they present. If it reaches that point, we can then sit down with the chairperson, Mr. Mitchell, and the Irish Government to review the situation.

If there is a violation of the six Mitchell principles, we shall look at that, but I hope that we can keep in the loyalist parties, if that is possible, because they have a been a plus in the process. On the grounds that I set out earlier in my speech, we should like, if we can, to make the process inclusive of Sinn Fein, but it has to give us an unequivocal ceasefire and the commitment by word and deed to the six Mitchell principles, so that we know that there is a commitment to the democratic process.

I hope, therefore, that the revived forum will feel able to reach out across the community in Northern Ireland and to approach its work in a spirit of seeking the greatest degree of agreement across the divides. I hope, too, that the forum will carefully consider the relationship between its ability to fulfil its statutory remit and the style in which its business is conducted and regulated. Much good can come from the forum, and I commend the draft order to the House.

11.49 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I congratulate the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on her appointment, and I thank her for her gracious tribute to her predecessor, Sir Patrick Mayhew, and for her words of welcome to me. I am not sure where she got the idea that my current position was temporary. Perhaps she knows something that I do not. I have to wait and see what happens.

I think that we all understand the difficulty of the task that the Secretary of State has undertaken, and I know that those Conservative Members who have held her high office will appreciate the difficulty of that task. In past weeks, we have seen some of those difficulties. We saw them over the weekend with the land mine that was planted by the IRA, with the horrific murder of Constable Greg Taylor of Ballymoney—I think that the whole House would join me in sending our condolences and sympathy to his family—and with some of the preludes to the marching season. I do not think any of us, on either side of the House, believe that she has an easy task ahead, and we wish her well.

The Secretary of State asked about the bipartisan policy. Tonight is perhaps an indication of that, as I certainly, on behalf of the Opposition, welcome the order. It fulfils undertakings that were given, both by her party and by mine, when the forum was suspended that it would be brought back into being at the same time as the talks resumed. She has cut it pretty fine with the talks starting tomorrow, but that commitment has been fulfilled and I welcome it.

I think I can say on behalf of all of us that we wish the Secretary of State success in the negotiations that begin tomorrow. I know from my personal experience that from 10 June onwards such negotiations are not easy. They are hard, complicated and sometimes frustratingly slow, but they are essential because they are the right way forward if an agreement is to be found in Northern Ireland. I realise, as I am sure the right hon. Lady does, that there are no short cuts, no quick fixes and no magic wands to be waved, and that this process can be taken forward only by painstaking negotiation, which is designed not just to achieve negotiating results, but to build confidence and to give the necessary reassurance which can make substantive progress possible. That, of course, must always include grinding out the details of the Mitchell recommendations and principles.

We can all use those terms easily, but when it comes to applying them in terms of creating confidence in the negotiations, we all know that they are much more complex and difficult than that. I am sure that, during the coming weeks and months, all the participants at Castle Buildings in Belfast will come to the table determined to try to find a way through the difficulties that we had before the talks were suspended in March, and to find a way through to the substantive negotiations that are their purpose.

The talks process was designed to be inclusive, but as we know, it is still without Sinn Fein. It is worth sometimes reminding ourselves that, although we talk about the process being incomplete, nine out of 10 parties are

represented, which between them represent 85 per cent. of the people of Northern Ireland. That is, on any view, a majority of both communities and perfectly capable of taking the process forward, if necessary.

At the moment, it seems that that is all that is available, because, as we know at this time, there has been no unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire. There has been no restoration of the ceasefire at all. Some people thought that there might be a de facto ceasefire, but that view was dashed on Saturday when the land mine was planted by the IRA, giving a message contrary to any idea that the IRA intended at this time to eschew violence in pursuance of its political objectives. I am afraid that the message that that gave was depressingly familiar. However, it emphasises the fact that we cannot negotiate with the republican movement or its representatives until they accept the democratic principles and the fact that only by exclusively peaceful methods can they pursue their political objectives.

That is why, in the statute that the right hon. Lady will have to operate if ever the time comes when she does invite Sinn Fein, she will be looking not just at whether there is a ceasefire in word and deed, but at whether there is a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and a commitment to adhere to democratic principles.

We have watched with interest the contacts between the right hon. Lady's officials and Sinn Fein. We have always exercised the greatest caution in that respect, although the option was always available. I am sure that she will agree that adherence to democratic principles cannot and must not be fudged—it has to clear if there is to be the confidence that will allow the process to be taken forward by all those participating. I should be interested to know whether, in the light of the incidents over the weekend, any consideration has been given to whether there will be further meetings.

I also welcome the indication that the right hon. Lady gave us again today that the Government are continuing with the policy followed by the Conservative Government—namely, that the democratic process cannot be held to ransom by one political party. If a party excludes itself, as Sinn Fein is doing at the moment, the process must go on without it. If it comes in later, it must accept the position that it finds within that process and not expect the process to start all over again.

It is perhaps ironic that the forum being resurrected by the order is open to Sinn Fein, and has been since last June's elections. Sinn Fein could and can still take its seats there. It is indicative of what I believe to be an à la carte approach to democracy—as we saw when its two Members of Parliament wanted to have the facilities of the House without participating in our deliberations—that it has not taken its seats in the forum.

In welcoming the order, I recognise that, as well as a fair amount of politics over the past year, the forum did prove that it was hard working, that it was ready to look at the details and that it was not all about rhetoric. When it was set up it was envisaged as a forum for Northern Ireland's elected representatives to discuss issues relevant to promoting dialogue and understanding, although I think that it is fair to say that the ways in which it sometimes did that were not necessarily the first that one would think of as relevant in that context.

I hope that in this, the second of the two years available under the statute, the forum will now extend its activities to fulfil the wider expectations originally set out for it. Of those, perhaps the most important is the interface with the public and the forum being seen as a vehicle for hearing the views of the wider community and interest groups on how to take peace and reconciliation forward in Northern Ireland.

The forum is not and has never been a part of the negotiations, but I believe that it is able to help to create the environment and atmosphere in Northern Ireland that will make the negotiations less fraught. That promotion of dialogue and understanding, which is very much at the heart of the concept of the forum, is a challenge to all the political parties in Northern Ireland. I hope that in and through the forum they will all indicate that they are prepared to rise to that challenge.

Mr. Canavan: The right hon. Gentleman rightly laid emphasis on a bipartisan approach. However, when Sir Patrick Mayhew was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, he said that he did not want to introduce immediate legislation based on the North commission report on marches. Can we expect a bipartisan approach if the new Labour Government introduce appropriate legislation? Will we have the Opposition's support?

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman is asking for an entirely blank cheque. That has never been a part of any bipartisan approach. Sir Patrick Mayhew introduced certain elements of the North report, and he rightly believed that, because of their possible implications, other elements required further consideration. We hope that the Secretary of State will talk to us about her proposals—as Sir Patrick Mayhew consulted her about his position—and we will consider any proposals that she makes according to whether we believe that they can work. I am sure that she, too, will wish to consider that aspect of the matter in deciding possible legislation.

I join the Secretary of State in hoping that the Social Democratic and Labour party, having made its protest, will now return to the forum to re-create the breadth of dialogue that will give real hope to the Province. In Northern Ireland, staying away must become a weapon of the past. I hope that taking part will become the message for the future.

I therefore welcome the order, and I wish the Government Godspeed in their endeavours to achieve agreement. I cannot with honesty declare that I shall miss being in Castle Buildings tomorrow, but a little bit of my heart will be with the Secretary of State when she starts the talks.

Marjorie Mowlam: I should like to answer the right hon. Gentleman's question about meetings with Sinn Fein after the discovery in Poleglass at the weekend. There is no doubt that that was a very serious incident, involving a large bomb which could have caused massive destruction if it had been detonated. As I said, meetings between officials and Sinn Fein depend on events. Currently no other meetings are scheduled. After Sinn Fein and officials met last week, no meetings were scheduled for this week. We shall, however, keep the situation under careful review, especially when a decision on further meetings is taken.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that clarification, and I am sure that she is right to adopt that attitude.

[Mr. Ancram]

I wish the forum well in building an understanding on which a new future for Northern Ireland can be established. The Opposition support the order.

12.1 am

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Without joining the love-in, I should like to wish the Secretary of State well in the years to come. I extend that wish to the other Ministers who have come to the north of Ireland and who are making and have made contributions to the process. I thank them for that, and I wish them well.

I am not a great adherent of bipartisanship, because I believe that, when issues are really serious, it can be a drawback and have a stifling effect. It can prevent the type of thinking and dialogue which is essential in crisis situations.

We should ask ourselves one simple question. Is there not an air of unreality about a situation in which an hour and a half of parliamentary time is provided for a debate on the re-creation of a body, such as a forum, while there is insufficient parliamentary time to establish the North commission and powers that will probably be needed to stand between the future and another summer such as we had last year?

Today's debate is a microcosm of that air of unreality. It also shows us that, by becoming too cosy in a forum such as the House, we may be stifling thinking and debate and placing them into a cocoon, rather than stimulating them. I believe that this debate is nothing but a cocoon around some of the real issues. The forum is not important in terms of solving these problems. As the former Secretary of State said, it is a new opportunity

"to listen to the view of others . . . in order to promote dialogue and understanding."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 1996; Vol. 275, c. 859.]

The present Secretary of State has reiterated that, and it is a wise and noble thought. The reality, however, is that the forum was a price paid by the previous Government to the Unionist Opposition, who had sufficient numbers in the House to demand the price and get it. The price that they demanded was the forum, which in fact has no role in the negotiations. That is the honest position.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mallon: I will give way in a moment. I have outlined the honest position. If we want to fool ourselves for the next hour or so that what we are doing tonight is of great import, that is grand—but do we want to face the reality?

Mr. Hunter: I have heard the hon. Gentleman's argument before, but there is something that I do not understand. In the Republic of Ireland, a forum was established to promote dialogue and understanding. The hon. Gentleman supported it and his party took part—he may even have done so himself. What is the fundamental difference between that attempt in the Republic of Ireland to promote dialogue and understanding and the lesser role being played by the forum in the Province of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Mallon: I should have thought that one of the self-evident differences was that at that time there were no negotiations in the north of Ireland. Those negotiations had not been set up. We were continuing in a political limbo, and the opportunity existed to create a body which would try to bring Sinn Fein into the political process after the declaration of the ceasefire. It was right to embark on that, but it is also right to remember that that forum was the only all-Ireland political body created on the island of Ireland since partition—and it was blown out of existence by the IRA. It is often forgotten that that all-Ireland body was destroyed by the IRA. That tells us something about their attitude.

I wish to deal now with a few specific matters. Let us strip away the platitudes and some of the things that we have to say. I understand that Secretaries of States and former Secretaries of State, Ministers of State and former Ministers of State, have to say certain things, but I should like to challenge some of them today. It is my job to challenge things, as gently as I possibly can—that is my role.

First, what is decommissioning? It is not something vague or something that the very name can hide. It is the getting rid of illegal arms held by proscribed organisations. I suggest that we look carefully at responsibility in relation to the holding and use of illegal weaponry. I go further and suggest that the primary and fundamental responsibility rests with the two sovereign Governments involved.

There is a cop-out, and the Secretary of State touched on it. The two main parties—the Ulster Unionist party and my party, the SDLP—could not solve the decommissioning issue in the previous section of the talks. We are not Governments, we do not have any powers, we do not have any authority and we do not have any arms, but there are two sovereign Governments in the talks process telling us, "Get on with it, lads; deal with decommissioning." I put it to the two Governments that, as from tomorrow, it should be made clear within the negotiations that the primary responsibility lies with them to effect those changes that will protect life on the island of Ireland.

The political parties will facilitate and will, I hope, ensure, as the Mitchell report says, that decommissioning is addressed and carried in parallel with negotiations. The onus is being put on the smaller political parties—there are three of us here from my party—to decommission the entire organisations of the Irish Republic Army, the Ulster Defence Association, the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Red Hand commandos and the Irish National Liberation Army. There is something unfair and dishonest about that, evading the core of the problem. We shall try to face up to our responsibilities, but the primary responsibility does not lie with the political parties, which do not have arms.

My second point is crucial. We have talked about the Mitchell principles—as opposed to the proposals. Those principles are the logical conclusion of being part of the political process. The conclusions are an adherence to the democratic process and an abhorrence of and moving away from the use of arms. The public perception of the process that I am part of tomorrow is compromised by the violence carried out by organisations which are advised—or whatever—by parties in the negotiations. I am not trying to get rid of anybody—I want everybody in—but it is difficult to sustain the credibility of the talks process when people are being killed, when arms are being used and when breaches of the Mitchell principles are being ignored. Can we afford to continue to ignore that?

My third point is that I would like the term "the peace process" to go out of the political vocabulary both within and outside the negotiations. Every time I hear or use the phrase, I ask myself what it means. Is it a process towards peace? I do not think so. Peace must be the starting point. Everything else derives from peace. Then there is a political process. It will take time to get the necessary political arrangements. The resolution of conflict in its various forms stems from peace, as does the healing process, which will take generations and will require a sense of space and time. Those processes do not lead to peace. If they are to be successful, they must derive from peace. The problem is difficult enough without continuing violence. Without peace, it will be not just difficult, but almost impossible.

My last point is that consent has been used in the House and outside it. I take some credit for ensuring, in a forum that I attended, that the issue of consent was faced. That was the forum for peace and reconciliation in Dublin, when I was across the table from Sinn Fein. Sinn Fein could not respond. It stayed out of the nationalist consensus on the island of Ireland. All the nationalist parties north and south subscribed to the principle of consent; Sinn Fein stayed outside that nationalist consensus.

The coin of consent, however, has two sides. It is a responsibility of the Unionist political community and of British Governments to ensure that both sides of that coin of consent are fundamental parts of the political arrangements that we have to make. Consent applies to any change in the position of Northern Ireland. My consent does not mean that I have to agree—nor do I agree—with the constitutional position in the north of Ireland. In the democratic process, I must have the right to try to change that constitutional position by peaceful, democratic means. Until I do that, I must have the right to live in that part of the island of Ireland with dignity, with equality, with justice and with a sense of unity of purpose, which is my entitlement.

The consent that is given by the nationalist parties in the island of Ireland must be reciprocated in a very fundamental way. That is something that simply has not been faced up to. It has not been faced up to by Governments here and it has not been faced up to by Unionist political parties in the north of Ireland.

Only when we start to get to the core of the problems that we face shall we realise how fundamental the changes will be. Like it or not, there is a changed political scenario. Like it or not, the arrangement that was made in 1921 is an anachronism which is no longer adequate in the world in which we live. Like it or not, a new approach is required.

It is not enough for parties in this place to bat platitudes across the Floor of the House, as sometimes occurs. Unless we all recognise that we are in a totally changed and changing situation and that we must bring a new view to it all, the violence—the young policeman who was kicked to death, the young man in Portadown who was kicked to death, the people who might have been killed by the 500 lb bomb at the weekend and those who have already been killed—will continue, and we shall continue with the platitudes. Alternatively, we can face up to the reality of what is required and of what has to be done: we can get the courage to go and do it and use this forum and others to provide the imaginative stimulus that will allow us to do that.

12.17 am

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): We in the Ulster Unionist parliamentary party welcome the order. I have not seen a debate on Northern Ireland so well attended as this evening's. It is encouraging that we have such interest in Northern Ireland—particularly among Government Members, and I pay tribute to that—because it is one of the most difficult situations facing this Government. It is very dangerous indeed.

I thank the Secretary of State for her tribute to the former leader of our party, Lord Molyneaux, the former Member of Parliament for Lagan Valley, and for her welcome to our two new colleagues in the Ulster Unionist parliamentary party, my hon. Friends the Members for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) and for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson)

I pay tribute to the spokesman for Her Majesty's Opposition, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), for the way in which he served Northern Ireland. We did not always agree. We disagreed with him over the way in which he damaged our education system in Northern Ireland, but realise that he gave his time and best efforts to Northern Ireland, which we certainly appreciate.

We welcome the Secretary of State and her team of Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office. We wish them well because we know that, as representatives of the main political party in Northern Ireland and of the Government of the day, we have to work together in trying to resolve the terrible issues facing us in the Province.

I was very encouraged indeed that, within days of taking office, the Prime Minister gave priority to the Northern Ireland issue. He was following the example of the previous Prime Minister, to whom we are grateful for the time, effort and courtesy he extended to us in the Ulster Unionist party and, indeed, to all other political parties in Northern Ireland, on matters affecting Northern Ireland. I am delighted that the new Prime Minister has shown the same interest and concern about the situation and that his first speech as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom was in Belfast and was well received by both sections of the community. That in itself is an achievement in Northern Ireland politics.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): I am very grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's comments about my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. Why, therefore, was he so disingenuous this morning when he referred to what my right hon. Friend said about the Irish famine?

Mr. Taylor: Trust the hon. Gentleman to introduce an unpleasant matter into a debate on Northern Ireland. We are trying to lower the temperature of Northern Ireland, but as usual his contributions are unhelpful.

Mr. Stott: You said it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order.

Mr. Taylor: The debate is about the forum, not the talks. Yes, the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 created both the forum and the talks process. I agree so much with what the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said. We do not like the

[Mr. Taylor]

process being called the peace process. It is the political process for the future of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

As the Prime Minister said when he addressed the audience in the great Kings hall in Belfast, one of the realities of the situation is that no one in that hall in Belfast—not even the youngest people present—could foresee an united Ireland. That is one of the realities that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh has to accept. Although I realise that people in other communities in Northern Ireland have to accept other realities, the reality to which the Prime Minister referred is one of the basic realities that the hon. Gentleman in return must accept if we are to make progress and achieve consent from the people of Northern Ireland. Ultimately, it will be an agreement supported with the consent of the people through a referendum that will count.

Mr. Mallon: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the previous Secretary of State, the previous Prime Minister and, by implication, the present Prime Minister that the agenda for negotiations was open-ended, nothing was predetermined and nothing could be ruled out or ruled in? Does he agree that that is an accurate summation, and does he agree with the summation itself?

Mr. Taylor: I stand by what I said: one of the realities in Northern Ireland is that we must have the consent of the people. I shall return to that issue in my references to the Secretary of State. One of the qualifications for getting consent is that the settlement for Northern Ireland is within the framework of the United Kingdom. That is a reality to which those of a nationalist persuasion will have to give their consent, even though, as the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh said, it will not necessarily mean that they agree with it.

The debate is about the forum and not the political process at Stormont. Many of us will be leaving London at 6.30 am to return to Belfast for the talks that commence at Stormont at 10 am. Generally speaking, the forum has been a success. Eight of the 10 political parties in Northern Ireland participate in it. I have served on many elected bodies—at Stormont, at the old Parliament and the Assemblies, at the European Parliament for 10 years and in the House since 1983. I have therefore served on policy committees in all three institutions—at Westminster, Stormont and Strasbourg.

I have been delighted to experience the committee work of the new Northern Ireland forum in Belfast, where the representatives of eight political parties, from all traditions and all religious backgrounds, work together on social and economic issues. They work on bread-and-butter matters that affect all the people of Northern Ireland.

The forum has produced some excellent reports that have been almost ignored by the press and the media, even in Northern Ireland. Its reports include those on bovine spongiform encephalopathy, on the fishing industry and ones that, generally, Labour Members would have supported. For example, one criticised the then Government for their closure of the Dundonald training centre. The new Government want to increase training provision in Northern Ireland. It also produced reports that criticised the then Government's reduction in moneys for our schools throughout Northern Ireland.

That excellent work has been carried out by elected members. I support what the Secretary of State said—I hope that other parties that are not present on the forum will reconsider their position.

Sinn Fein was never excluded from the forum. It is its own decision that it is not there; no one closed the door on it. Representatives of the Social and Democratic Labour party, the sister party of the Labour party, walked out. It is led by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume), who said that he would talk to anyone in Northern Ireland, anywhere and at any time. He and his party had such an opportunity at the forum, but, after a few months, they walked out. I think that that was a regrettable decision, although I understand the circumstances surrounding what happened. I hope that, as a gesture of good will to the people of Northern Ireland, the SDLP will reconsider its position and listen to the appeal by the Secretary of State and the Unionist community. I hope that it will consider returning to the forum and participating in the committee work on social and economic matters affecting the Province.

Mr. Canavan: Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider the decision of his party not to participate in the British-Irish interparliamentary forum, which is extremely important to establishing a dialogue between this Parliament and the Dail? The Ulster Unionists are conspicuous by their absence. That body is possibly impoverished by their absence.

Mr. Taylor: I know very little about that body. I was not aware that it was important. It has nothing to do with the talks process or the order before the House tonight. It is considered by most people in Northern Ireland to be a junket. It is well known that it often meets when there are rugby internationals. It usually meets on a Friday, when the rugby match is on the Saturday. We know what goes on at that kind of junket.

The situation in Northern Ireland is extremely volatile. Hon. Members from Scotland, England and Wales do not realise how serious things are becoming on the ground. Tonight, we must give thanks to the police and the Army for what they do in the dangerous situation that exists in Northern Ireland, as it has for the past for 25 years. Those who live there and work with local people know how difficult things have become in the past few weeks. We have had some terrible incidents, including the killing of the young man in Portadown, that of the policeman at Ballymoney and the return of IRA violence.

The Secretary of State said that she would judge IRA-Sinn Fein on the basis of events on the ground. She seemed to imply that it was all right to have a bomb as long as it did not go off. I do not know what she meant by events on the ground, but the reality is that the IRA had a major bomb on the ground, and that it is the military wing of Sinn Fein—they are both members of the Irish republican movement and cannot be separated. We Ulster Unionists would say that the Secretary of State should not be considering talks with Sinn Fein while the IRA is active on the ground, regardless of whether a bomb goes off.

I was glad to read in *The Irish Times* today that the Dublin Government are reconsidering having any further contact with IRA-Sinn Fein, and I hope that the United Kingdom Government will take a similar line. We all have a duty, as the talks commence in Northern Ireland tomorrow, to be positive and try to make them succeed.

There has been progress, despite major difficulties. There was a difficulty over the appointment of a chairman; it was resolved. There were major difficulties over the rules of procedure; they were resolved. There was a great difficulty about the agenda for the first plenary session; that was finally agreed. Progress has been made, and the next stage is—I agree with the Secretary of State's phrase—to address the problem of decommissioning. We in the Ulster Unionist party believe that to address an issue means resolving it.

I do not expect much progress in the coming week, because there is an election in the southern part of Ireland later in the week, and until we know what Government will emerge there, there will not be full participation by all the political delegations; but I hope that all parties in Northern Ireland, from both communities, recognising how serious a situation is developing on the ground, will make every effort to be positive and reach agreement, because we need consent in Northern Ireland.

The Secretary of State represents a Government with a very large majority. Such Governments have existed before. This is our sovereign Parliament: it makes the laws and the decisions; but there must be consent among the people to whom the decisions will have to apply. The Government must not think that they can run roughshod over the people of Northern Ireland.

Consent is the basis for progress in Northern Ireland, and I hope that in considering her decisions in the weeks and months that lie ahead, the Secretary of State will recognise the importance of consent from the people who will look up to her as their senior political officer in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it right and proper for an hon. Member to try to exercise a veto by threat over the decisions of a sovereign Government, in the same way as a veto is exercised over other people's right of opinion in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not sure that that is a point of order for the Chair. I think that the right hon. Gentleman was expressing an opinion.

12.33 am

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in the debate. I endorse the welcome that has been given to the Secretary of State and the entire Front-Bench team, and hope that their ministrations at the Northern Ireland Office will be fruitful for the people of Northern Ireland. I also pay tribute to the shadow Secretary of State, and to the former Secretary of State, who is shortly to go to another place. We disagreed fundamentally with their team on many issues, but we were received with the courtesy with which such dialogue should be conducted, and I thank them for that.

The debate so far has centred on the backcloth to the order, which is simply the decision to re-enact section 3 of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996, which concerned the creation of the forum. Much has been said already about the backcloth of violence, division and hatreds that bedevils our community in Northern Ireland, and indeed, in the south.

The legislation's intent was that the forum should be a place for

"the discussion of issues relevant to promoting dialogue and understanding within Northern Ireland."

That has been stated by both Front-Bench spokespersons, and by other hon. Members tonight, to be the primary objective. What the forum would not be was also clearly stated. It would not be a legislative, executive or administrative body and it would not determine the conduct, course or outcome of negotiations. The then Minister responsible for political development emphasised that its sole purpose was the promotion of dialogue and understanding by deliberative actions only. In discussing the forum tonight, we must measure its activities against the yardstick of whether it promoted understanding and dialogue. The answer must be a categorical no.

I listened with interest when the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) listed a series of what he described as very worthwhile reports that emanated from the forum and its committees. They dealt with BSE, fishing, education, roads and many other items on the social and economic agenda. However, those matters were already common cause among all the parties in Northern Ireland. The parties of Northern Ireland were united on the BSE crisis and in opposing the proposals of the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for the dismantling of our education system. Those socio-economic issues were not controversial. We must measure the forum's daily work not against those issues but against the promotion of dialogue and understanding. No hon. Member would argue that the pursuit of lifting the beef ban is directed towards dialogue and understanding in Northern Ireland, although it might come about as an abstruse side-effect of it.

Mr. Barnes: Is it not good that people should on occasion get together to discuss things on which they agree? Such agreement would be within a framework, and discussion and argument within a framework helps to clarify people's positions. The forum, like the Anglo-Irish parliamentary body, discusses many things on which there is agreement and can produce fruitful reports that can be voted on.

Mr. McGrady: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but he is not comparing like with like. It is right for the Anglo-Irish parliamentary body to discuss such issues. It might be correct for the forum to discuss similar issues, but that was not the purpose for which it was established. Its purpose was to promote dialogue and understanding, and to create an atmosphere in which the inter-party talks would have the best possible environment to proceed. While I have already said that it is a good thing for the forum's committees to have dealt with such issues, that was not their primary purpose. Most of the parties agreed about them outside the forum. BSE and education were inter-party matters long before they were touched by the forum.

Let me get back the real yardstick by which we can judge whether the work of the forum was correct or not. There was the debate on flags and emblems, the debate on parity of esteem and the debate on marches and such matters. It is interesting to note what type of debate was taking place, because I and the community I represent considered them to be divisive and, in some cases, offensive.

It was stated of my own party that we

"have a vested interest in having trouble in this province."

[Mr. McGrady]

It was also said of us:

"As for convincing the IRA to give up the armed struggle, what has the SDLP done but encourage the IRA to continue its destabilising activities?"

Are those the statements of statesmanship, of approaching the opposite number, or of trying to have reconciliatory dialogue? Obviously not.

A member of the Democratic Unionist party said that boycotts were

"being waged against our community by another section of the community who are so filled with hatred and invective against my community that they will stop at nothing. This boycott campaign is just another reflection of their hatred for the Protestant community."

Is that peacemaking? Is that not inflammatory? A member of the Ulster Unionist party stated:

"I have started my boycott. I will not shop in any Catholic shops."

Is that reconciliation? Is that the furtherance of what the forum was set up for?

That is why, when the Act was first debated, I said that there was a distinct possibility that the creation of such a forum would provide a platform for the worst type of divisive speeches and comments. It could be argued, although I shall not do so this morning, that, had we been present when those debates were taking place, the invective would have been a lot worse and more divisive, which would have placed a greater strain on inter-community relations.

The reason why the SDLP left the forum on 13 July last year—hon. Members will know that 13 July follows 12 July, and I know what that means in Northern Ireland—was that it was the only weapon available to a democratic party in Northern Ireland that had consistently opposed violence, struggled against violence and suffered violence from both the IRA and the UVF. It was the maximum expression of our rejection of the events at Drumcree last summer that we, as a democratic party, could exercise.

I make no apology for having participated in that decision to withdraw. If this summer is the same as last summer, then God help us all in Northern Ireland. I will say, however, that if this summer is treated by those who are responsible for marches and those who are responsible for opposing marches with some accommodation and understanding, we will be able to reconsider our position. Nothing is set in stone in Northern Ireland, and nor should it ever be.

The only point I wish to make this morning is that, in spite of the statements from both Front Bench speakers, the forum did not do the job for which it was set up and was, in fact, a contributory factor in enhancing the divisions in Northern Ireland.

12.44 am

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Much ground has been covered in the debate. My colleagues and I welcome the new Labour spokesmen on Northern Ireland on the Government Front Bench. They will be received with the usual courtesy that Northern Ireland people extend to everyone. They will have the opportunity to exchange their views with us, as did the previous Government. We disagreed almost entirely with the Conservative Government.

Tonight, we cannot agree on the very basis on which the negotiations are going on. We have been told tonight that that basis is the Downing street declaration and the framework document. I do not know how many Members now in the Chamber have read those two documents. I do not know how many Members know what the people of Northern Ireland said when the documents were examined and voted on at elections. I do not know whether Members are aware that there is only one option in the framework document, and that is to go down the road that would eventually lead to a united Ireland. That is a road that the majority of the people of Northern Ireland will not be going down.

The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), shakes his head, but he has been over this ground. He had the opportunity at the talks to refute what we said. Instead, he sat in silence. On many occasions the Secretary of State did not open his mouth after long speeches during which argument after argument was raised. The Secretary of State merely said, "I have nothing to say to you." That is the way in which they entered the talks.

The Dublin Government, the Social Democratic and Labour party and the IRA-Sinn Fein never wanted the forum. Indeed, they opposed it from the very beginning. It is not right to say that the forum has nothing to do with the talks process for it provides the way into that process. But without election to the forum, one could not be present to engage in the talks process. That was the way in.

There was opposition from Dublin, from the SDLP, from Sinn Fein and from the right hon. Member for Redcar (Ms Mowlam), who is now Secretary of State. She is on record about her opposition to the forum at the time of which I am speaking. In other words, there is widespread opposition.

The IRA, which wants to look at the Secretary of State's eyeballs, says that it wants to examine the eyeballs of Unionists. It had the opportunity to come to the forum, but it did not do so. Why was that? The IRA did not come because the forum mirrors proportions of people and their views. The talks do not do that. Those who were not elected, or could not be, to the forum came in only by talking up to those who came in under the 10 procedure. They had the same number of people at the talks table as those who had larger proportions of support.

In the talks process that is to commence tomorrow there will be no mirroring of the percentage of votes casts for a party in Northern Ireland. At the same time, the forum is like the House in that there is representation by proportion under the system that the Government agreed. That is why Sinn Fein will not attend. It does not want a democratic debate.

It is wrong for the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) to say that the forum did not tackle most difficult subjects. For example, the forum dealt with boycotting. It set up a committee to deal with it. That committee received representations from both religious sections of the community. It examined the Province in that it examined everyone who wanted to give evidence. The forum adopted the same approach towards parades. A parades committee went round the Province and heard representatives of all parties. On the committee were representatives of both religious communities in Northern Ireland. So it is wrong to say that they talked about BSE.

They talked about education and matters on which we are all agreed, but education is a dividing issue, too, in Northern Ireland.

It was very good that we were able to get together and have a good report on education, which the previous Prime Minister accepted, because the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) wanted to destroy the five boards in Northern Ireland and destroy our education. Everybody united, including representatives of the Roman Catholic schools, and gave evidence to the forum committee on education. That was very good. We got an agreement and won that particular battle.

I trust that the House takes into consideration that the forum did a useful job, but there was always intensive opposition to it. The Government did not like it. They castigated it and said things about it, because it was not a yes man to the Government. Other people criticised the forum. They could not get rid of it quickly enough, so when they wanted an adjournment of the talks, they rushed into the House and took away the right of the forum to continue. It could have continued under law until 30 May. It could have had a meeting before today, but the House said no, because Dublin wanted it out of the way. The Social Democratic and Labour party wanted it out of the way. Sinn Fein wanted it out of the way, so they got it out of the way.

I made it clear that, if the forum was not recalled, my party would not be at the talks until it was recalled and had a sitting. My party will be following that. I do not make statements to my electorate in an election and not keep them. I will keep to that statement. We will not be there tomorrow, but the farce is that, tomorrow, the Foreign Secretary of the south of Ireland is travelling up because it is an election gimmick. He will be in Stormont and then this week there will be the election in the south.

There should not be a meeting tomorrow. It will be adjourned anyway, because there will not be a Government in the south. They will have no representation there. So why rush it in the way that it has been rushed? The forum should never have been abandoned. It could have gone on, and then after the 30th it could have been given fresh powers. That was the attitude of the House, but instead it was rudely dismissed.

Mr. Canavan: I am a wee bit perplexed because the hon. Gentleman describes himself as a Unionist. Does he accept the sovereignty of the House with regard to his constituency and the six counties of Northern Ireland? If the House passes legislation—for example, to implement the recommendations of Professor North's report on parades in Northern Ireland—will the hon. Gentleman commend that legislation to his constituents?

Rev. Ian Paisley: No, I will not, because the hon. Gentleman does not commend. I sat in the House when he did not commend to his constituents what the House was doing, and rightly so.

Mr. Canavan: But I am not a Unionist.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Yes, but it does not matter what someone's political persuasion is—

Mr. Canavan: It does.

Rev. Ian Paisley: It does not. *[Interruption.]* If the House were to say tonight that Northern Ireland is to be part of the Republic, it could not implement the arrangement, because the people are not for that. The Tory Government thought that they could implement the poll tax, but could they? No. They had to lose their leader and do a somersault. The Government can force on people only what people are prepared to accept. We must accept the laws of the House, although we have power to protest against them. I have protested against laws made by the House, and I have done time in prison for doing so. I make no apology for that. I am not prepared to say to the House, "Do what you like with us, and we will accept it"; nor would any other democrat.

The vast majority of the people of Northern Ireland, including a large number of Roman Catholics—according to Mr. Denis Faul, a Roman Catholic priest who is prominent in the north, at least 15 to 17 per cent.—want to stay in the Union. Those people do not want a united Ireland, and it is no use the House saying to the people of Northern Ireland, "You must have a united Ireland."

Perhaps the present Government are changing the goal posts. I was told by the Government to attend talks, because those talks were about a settlement firmly within the United Kingdom. I went to them to discuss how we could secure a settlement in the United Kingdom. If the attitude is that we must be pushed out of the United Kingdom, that is not why the talks were called for. There is, however, a solution to the problem. The House has passed legislation allowing the Secretary of State, at the stroke of her pen, to hold a referendum in Northern Ireland at any time to decide whether the people there want to remain within the United Kingdom.

I asked the last Government why they did not resurrect the legislation, and deal with that matter first. After holding the referendum, they could go on to talk about how Northern Ireland should be governed within the Union. I challenge the Secretary of State. There is going to be a discussion about a referendum in Scotland, which the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) wants—

Mr. Canavan: No, I do not.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The hon. Gentleman does not want a referendum in Scotland?

Mr. Canavan: No, I do not. In fact, I take the view that, owing to the Conservative wipe-out in Scotland, we have a mandate to proceed with the setting up of a Scottish Parliament without any need for a referendum. As for the constitutional question in Northern Ireland, I asked an explicit question regarding an internal matter—not with regard to whether Northern Ireland should be reunited with the Republic, but with regard to internal legislation on, for example, parades. Would the hon. Gentleman accept legislation from the House on the conduct of parades?

Rev. Ian Paisley: If the North resolution is passed, it will be the law; but what is it for? It is to hand over to a body—not elected—the power of the police. Moreover, one of the members of that body is an officer in the constituency party of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume)—the chairman, I believe. [HON. MEMBERS: "Chairperson."] The chairperson, then.

It is very strange that, in that committee, unionism is not represented at all. One member represents the so-called Protestant paramilitaries. Tonight, the

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) asked whether the Secretary of State believed that the loyalist paramilitaries represented in the talks were keeping to the Mitchell proposals. At the talks, I in my foolishness drew the attention of both Governments to what the Protestant military outlawed combined military command had said. It had said that it was going to kill someone—

It being one and a half hours after the motion was entered upon, MR DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 16 (1)(Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents).*

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996 (Revival of Section 3) Order 1997, which was laid before this House on 15th May, be approved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We come to motion No. 4 on the Order Paper. It is not moved. We now come to the Adjournment.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Do I understand that motion No. 4 has not been moved?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It was not moved.

Privates Fisher and Wright

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

12.59 am

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I first pay tribute to the former hon. Member for Ayr, Mr. Philip Gallie, who campaigned strenuously on behalf of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. Conservatives Members miss him greatly.

I also place on the record the involvement and support of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), one of whose constituents is the mother of Guardsman Fisher. He has met her and seeks to help in every way possible. I also acknowledge the involvement of the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh): Guardsman Wright is his constituent. Both hon. Members substantially agree with the points that I shall make.

I also acknowledge the interest and concern of my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), for Mid–Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) and for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis).

On 4 September 1992, Guardsmen Fisher and Wright and others were patrolling in support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the New Lodge area of Belfast. Fisher was then 24 years old; Wright was 18. Both were young men of excellent record and good character. It was their first tour of duty in Northern Ireland, but they had experienced intensive training with the Scots Guards. They were as well trained and as well prepared as is possible.

At that time, one of the IRA's favoured weapons was the Mk 15 grenade, or coffee jar bomb: a jar filled with shrapnel, Semtex and a detonator. Fisher and Wright knew from their training that the IRA tried to lure Army patrols into an ambush, and threw those grenades, often from behind parked vehicles. There had been more than a dozen such incidents in the weeks preceding September 1992.

On 4 September, the patrol of which the guardsmen were part stopped for routine questioning a young man, Mr. Peter McBride, who was carrying a bag. Before the bag could be searched, McBride tore the radio earpiece out of the patrol commander's ear and fled. He leaped one wall, ran through a garden and cleared another wall. Fisher and Wright pursued, repeatedly shouting warnings to stop, but McBride ignored those warnings. Three streets later, the guardsmen recognised that a situation was developing that was the mirror image of training scenarios.

McBride, still clutching a bag that he had not wanted to be searched, had succeeded in drawing them away from their unit and was running towards a parked car. Fisher and Wright gave a final warning, which McBride again ignored. He was shot and killed. There was no grenade in the bag, and McBride was not a member of the IRA or any other terrorist organisation. Reportedly, his mother still goes to the cemetery where his body lies and asks, "What did you run for?"

To argue for the early release of Fisher and Wright, as I and many people do, is most emphatically not to deny or belittle the grief of the McBride family. Fisher and

Wright made a split-second decision in highly charged circumstances at a time of considerable tension, when, in accordance with their training and instruction, they believed that their own lives were in danger. Nevertheless, they were convicted of McBride's murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Much about the case of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright is deeply disturbing. First, it is a scandal that the law should treat those guardsmen in exactly the same way as it treats those who conspire to bomb, murder and maim and commit acts of terrorism against the state. We acknowledge that under existing legislation Fisher and Wright were correctly charged and convicted. We do not challenge the legality of the verdict, but we challenge the validity of the legislation that demanded their conviction.

As a result of the mandatory life sentence for murder, as Mr. Andrew Roberts wrote in *The Sunday Times* on 30 March:

"Loyal, well-disciplined servants of the crown, serving in a regiment . . . acting under orders with no malice aforethought, . . . have been incarcerated by the British state for doing their duty at a time of anti-terrorist high alert."

The law is wrong. It cannot be justified. It is revoltingly unfair. It is morally untenable. It must be changed. The cases of Fisher and Wright prove the point. By no stretch of the imagination can or should the two soldiers be treated in the same way as the IRA's calculating killers.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way during his eloquent testimony. Does he agree that this case and the parallel case of Private Clegg, as he was at that time, have entered the minds of thousands of our young men who are serving on our behalf and risking their lives in Northern Ireland? Some people whom I met while they were serving there and since have put to me, as I am sure my hon. Friend has had put to him, the fact that they do not know where they stand. Those people, the effective pursuit of whose duties is so important for peace in Northern Ireland, have had a doubt sown in their minds about whose side the law will be on when they act in good faith.

Mr. Hunter: I welcome my hon. Friend's intervention and entirely accept and endorse his point. If he will bear with me for a few seconds, I shall refer to the issue from my prepared text. My hon. Friend is right: there is no doubt whatever that, increasingly, people are saying, "Is it worth the risk?"

There is another issue. On one key point, judicial review disturbingly found against the Northern Ireland Office. Originally, the Northern Ireland life sentence unit ruled that the guardsmen's case should be not be reviewed until the end of 1998 at the six-year point in their sentences. The normal practice is for such cases to be reviewed at the 10-year stage. I understand that the Northern Ireland Office regarded the life sentence unit's ruling as a concession to Fisher and Wright, but it was not seen in that way universally. The decision caused concern in some quarters and it was felt that the review should take place even earlier.

The Northern Ireland Office has sometimes been accused of rejecting policy options on the ground that they might offend nationalist sensibilities. On this occasion, some people wondered whether political expediency had won the day at the cost of natural justice for two British soldiers. Unfortunately, the course of events gave credence to that cynical perception.

Fisher and Wright successfully applied for a judicial review of the Northern Ireland Office decision. On 20 December last year, Mr. Justice Girvan quashed the unit's decision and ordered that the two soldiers' cases should be freshly considered according to the precedents set by the cases of Privates Clegg and Thain who, having been found guilty of murder in comparable circumstances, had been released after serving three years and three and a half years respectively. In December 1996, Fisher and Wright had already served more than four years. For unspecified reasons, it appeared that the Northern Ireland Office wished them to be treated more harshly than Clegg and Thain.

My third point is that, in the light of all these considerations, no further delay in reviewing the cases of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright can be justified. With the Northern Ireland Office's original wish to delay the review overruled, in December last year, Crown counsel undertook that the Secretary of State would be personally involved with the review ordered by Mr. Justice Girvan. Shortly before he left office, Sir Patrick Mayhew instructed that the Life Sentence Review Board should consider the cases in October this year, rather than wait until December 1998, as had previously been decided.

That decision was greatly welcomed, but in one respect it also bewildered. If there are good reasons for reviewing the cases earlier than was previously deemed appropriate, why delay until the five-year point in the sentences? What is the justification? Why the arbitrary time scale? No material facts or circumstances relevant to the case will change between now and October.

The precedents set by the cases of Privates Thain and Clegg, Mr. Justice Girvan's robust comments when he gave his decision in December, and, not least, the comments in the Northern Ireland Prison Service letter, dated 17 April, to the guardsmen's solicitor all seem to argue for a review now and not in five months' time. The letter states unequivocally:

"There are exceptional mitigating circumstances in which the soldiers were operating in the course of their duty and the fact that there was no premeditation."

If there are exceptional mitigating circumstances, and the Northern Ireland Prison Service rightly acknowledges that there are, surely the guardsmen's cases should be reviewed without any further delay. I welcome the fact that Fisher and Wright's Belfast solicitor has been given leave to challenge the delay in reviewing the cases until October. It is now time for the Government to respond positively.

Feelings run high when people perceive that an injustice has been perpetrated and continues to be perpetrated. The British state trained and armed Guardsmen Fisher and Wright and then sent them to a hostile environment to implement Government policy. Like all other British soldiers, they were terrorist targets from the moment they landed in Northern Ireland.

Government surely have a duty to safeguard Fisher and Wright and all the other men and women of our armed services who are ordered to serve in Northern Ireland or elsewhere. I hope that the Minister understands the strength and intensity of feeling within the military community on this point. When tragedy occurs and dreadful mistakes happen, our soldiers should not be treated in the same way as people who knowingly and deliberately go out to murder and maim the innocent.

[Mr. Hunter]

If Government do not provide that protection, can we blame young men and young women if they decide not to volunteer? It just is not worth the risk.

The cases of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright and those of Privates Clegg and Thain before them go to the core of political morality and natural justice. I deeply regret that the Government whom I supported left this business unfinished. I hope that the present Government will not also disappoint.

1.14 am

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): The House knows that the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) has maintained a long-term interest on behalf of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. I genuinely congratulate him on his success in securing this Adjournment debate, albeit in the early hours of the morning. Beside me on the Bench is my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), whose constituent Mrs. Fisher is the mother of James Fisher.

For a number of different reasons, these cases are of great concern to people inside and outside this House. I welcome this opportunity to explain to the House the role of Ministers and the Northern Ireland Office in relation to them.

Notwithstanding what the hon. Gentleman said, I think that it is appropriate that I set out in some detail the circumstances pertaining to the issue. I shall, of course, deal with the points made by the hon. Gentleman in my response.

Guardsmen James Fisher and Mark Wright of the 1st Battalion of the Scots Guards were each sentenced to life imprisonment at Belfast Crown court on 10 February 1995 for the murder of an unarmed civilian youth, Peter Paul McBride. Their appeals to the Court of Appeal against conviction and sentence were dismissed on 21 December 1995, and they were refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords on 8 March 1996.

I come now to the way in which the law operates in cases of murder in Northern Ireland. The law in Northern Ireland does not permit a court to impose a discretionary sentence on someone convicted of murder. Instead, it requires the court to impose a sentence of life imprisonment. It therefore falls to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to decide whether, and if so when, it is appropriate to release a life sentence prisoner on licence.

In taking that decision, the Secretary of State is obliged to consult the Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland and the trial judge, if he is available. However, at the end of the day, the decision rests with the Secretary of State. The starting point for the decision is, of course, that the individual concerned has been properly convicted by the courts. It is not the role of the Secretary of State to determine questions of guilt or innocence.

The Secretary of State is, of course, supported in her function by formal mechanisms for the review of life sentence cases that have operated in Northern Ireland since 1983. The way in which that operates is that the Secretary of State is advised by the Life Sentence Review Board, which consists of senior officials of the Northern Ireland Office, with professional input from psychiatrists, psychologists and probation staff.

Normally, the board looks at cases for the first time at the 10-year point in the sentence and thereafter at intervals that it determines. When the board considers that a prisoner has served long enough to meet the requirements of retribution and deterrence and is no longer a threat to the public, it will recommend to the Secretary of State that the prisoner be released.

In order to ensure that the Life Sentence Review Board sees cases at a sufficiently early point so that its discretion and that of the Secretary of State is not fettered, there is also a process of regular internal review by the life sentence unit of the Northern Ireland Office. Those internal reviews normally take place upon committal or once normal appeal processes have been exhausted, and at the three-year and six-year points in sentence.

Cases will be looked at on other occasions, especially when there is a significant material change in circumstances. The purpose of those internal reviews is to determine whether cases should be seen by the Life Sentence Review Board at the normal 10-year point or whether earlier consideration by the review board would be appropriate.

I shall now deal with the specific cases of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. Their first internal review was commenced in early 1996. At that time, it was decided that the cases should be referred to the Life Sentence Review Board in October 1998—that is to say, when the prisoners would have served six years in custody.

The decision, which was taken by the permanent under-secretary of the Northern Ireland Office, was conveyed to the then Secretary of State, who expressed his agreement with it. The prisoners were told of the decision on 13 June 1996.

The decision was challenged in the courts by means of an application for judicial review. On 20 December 1996, the decision was quashed by Mr. Justice Girvan, who held that the Northern Ireland Office had not addressed itself to the proper question when examining the cases. In the judge's view, the test that should have been applied was whether the cases raised issues worthy of consideration by the board, and if so, when.

Mr. Justice Girvan also held that the Northern Ireland Office should have taken into account the reasoning of the then Home Secretary in relation to the release of Private Thain, whose release on licence was decided in England, in 1987. Furthermore, he held that fixed sentences of imprisonment imposed for the most serious crimes other than murder should have been considered for purposes of comparison. Mr. Justice Girvan also said that the Northern Ireland Office would have to address the issue whether there was real justification for treating the cases of Fisher and Wright differently from those of Clegg and Thain.

Subsequently, and in accordance with Mr. Justice Girvan's judgment, a fresh internal review was conducted of the cases of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. On that occasion, and on an exceptional basis, the then Secretary of State himself took the decision about the timing of referral to the Life Sentence Review Board following advice from his officials.

The Secretary of State concluded that—to ensure that the discretion of the Life Sentence Review Board and, ultimately, of the Secretary of State was not fettered by too late a referral—the cases should be reviewed by the board in October 1997, which was at the five-year point in sentence, which is five years earlier than the board normally makes a first review. The decision was, of course, without prejudice to the outcome of the review board's recommendations and the deliberations of a future Secretary of State.

On 17 April 1997, Guardsmen Fisher and Wright were advised of the outcome of the internal review. They have sought and been granted leave to seek judicial review of the fresh decision, and the review is currently listed for hearing on 13 June.

It might help if I were now, after explaining the process of internal review and its outcome, to set into its wider context the decision on the timing of the first review of the guardsmen's cases by the Life Sentence Review Board. In all life sentence cases, decisions on the timing of reviews and on release itself are taken individually and on their merits. The process involves gathering all available information about the offender and the offence, including the circumstances surrounding the murder, the role of the offender, his background and his propensity to reoffend.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ingram: No. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I should like to set the matter in its full context.

Mr. Welsh: My question is on the point that the Minister is dealing with.

Mr. Ingram: I should like to make progress. If there is sufficient time at the end of the debate, the hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to intervene.

Material in the process is drawn from a wide range of sources, including court judgments and prison reports. As I have already explained, the aim is to ensure that individual life sentence prisoners serve long enough to reflect the gravity of their offences and that, upon release, they will not be a danger to the public.

In Northern Ireland, the period served by life sentence prisoners is typically in a range between 10 and 20 years, and the average time served by released life sentence prisoners is currently about 15 years. At the higher end of the range are prisoners who have committed multiple offences or those involved in cases with aggravating circumstances or in which risk was considered to be a problem. Sentences at the lower end of the range reflect mitigating circumstances—for example, peripheral involvement and relative youth at the time of the offence. In a small number of cases, the mitigating circumstances are such as to result in periods served of less than 10 years.

The fact that Guardsmen Fisher and Wright will be seen by the review board for the first time at the five-year point instead of the 10-year point is an indication that, in their case, there are mitigating circumstances, which include the difficult circumstances in which the guardsmen were operating in Belfast and the fact that there was no premeditation.

Those mitigating circumstances, however, must be considered against other factors. Like any other citizen, members of the security forces may use only such force as is reasonable in the circumstances for the prevention of crime, or in effecting or assisting the lawful arrest of offenders or suspected terrorists. They have no immunity from the law, and they must always remain responsible for their actions under the law. That is a set of criteria that all decent-thinking persons in Northern Ireland and elsewhere want to see rigorously, but fairly, applied.

The fact is that the guardsmen committed a very serious offence, which resulted in a young life being lost. Moreover, at first instance and at appeal, the courts were very clear that the soldiers were in no appreciable danger and did not think that they were in danger when they fired. As the Lord Chief Justice pointed out in the Court of Appeal:

"No bomb or firearm of any type was found in the course of the search and it was not in dispute that at no time had the deceased been carrying a gun or a coffee jar bomb or any type of bomb. Therefore, as the deceased was shot when he was unarmed, the appellants, on the objective facts, had no lawful justification for firing at the deceased."

Comparisons have been drawn with the cases of other soldiers convicted of offences committed while on duty in Northern Ireland, notably those of Private Clegg and Private Thain. Clearly, there are parallels in terms of the lack of premeditation and the stresses on soldiers operating in Northern Ireland. However, it is not helpful to take the parallels too far or to ignore significant differences in the circumstances.

In the case of Private Thain, for example, the circumstances surrounding the offence were more confused and are too detailed to go into now. In the case of Private Clegg, the offence involved an oncoming car at night and split-second decisions—only Private Clegg's fourth shot was found to be unlawful.

Another case that was not mentioned but which has parallels is that of Trooper Clarke, who was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment for attempted murder committed while on duty as an unpremeditated act and on the spur of the moment. At the time he was sentenced, he had the expectation of serving, with remission, a period of just under seven years.

Mr. Welsh: Does the Minister accept that it is a tragedy for all the families involved—for the Irish family whose loss is irreparable and for the Scots families who find that their sons' lives are ruined? Does he understand the feelings of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Wright, who want an early review of their son Mark's sentence so that some hope might be restored to a situation that is otherwise without hope? I hope that the Minister will look for such an early review, to restore at least some hope to this general tragedy.

Mr. Ingram: I think that my comments showed an appreciation of the situation facing Guardsmen Fisher and Wright and, of course, that facing the family of the deceased. I was dealing with those very points.

In conclusion—this may deal with the hon. Gentleman's point—I have set out the background to the case and the legal context in which it sits. It is against that background and after careful consideration that I take the view that the guardsmen are being dealt with properly and fairly within the Northern Ireland life sentence review

[Mr. Ingram]

system. I would strongly refute any allegation that those involved in the process of review have shown bias against the guardsmen. However, as an additional safeguard, I can confirm that, as an exceptional measure, when the cases have been considered by the Life Sentence Review Board in October, its recommendation will be put to the Secretary of State, regardless of whether that recommendation is for release or for further detention.

Finally, let me assure the House that I listened with great interest to the comments of the hon. Member for Basingstoke. I wish to assure him that the views that he expressed will be kept firmly in mind when the cases are being considered. I hope that he and others who have contributed to this debate and those who are campaigning outside the House on behalf of Guardsmen Fisher and Wright are prepared to accept that the proper processes should now be allowed to proceed, conditioned as they are by the ultimate discretion invested in the Secretary of State.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 3 June 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received with great satisfaction the loyal and dutiful expression of your thanks for the Speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

PRIVATE BILLS (PROCEDURE)

Motion made,

That—

(1) the Promoters of every Private Bill which originated in this House or was brought from the House of Lords in the last Parliament shall have leave to proceed with that Bill, if they think fit, in the present Session;

(2) every such Bill which originated in this House shall be presented to the House not later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

(3) there shall be deposited with every Bill so presented a declaration signed by the Agent for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Parliament;

(4) every Bill so presented shall be laid by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the Table of the House on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill was presented;

(5) every Bill so laid on the Table shall be deemed to have been read the first time and (if the Bill had been read a second time in the last Parliament) to have been read a second time and—

(i) if such Bill had been referred to the Committee on Unopposed Bills in the last Parliament, it shall stand so referred;

(ii) if such Bill had been referred to a Committee during the last Parliament and not reported by that Committee to the House, the Bill shall stand committed and—

(a) all Petitions against the Bill which stood referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session, subject to the determination of any outstanding objection to the locus standi of any petitioner; and

(b) any minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

(iii) if such Bill had been reported by any Committee, it shall be ordered to be read the third time unless it had been reported with Amendments in the last Parliament and had not been considered as so amended, in which case it shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

(iv) if such Bill had been read the third time in the last Parliament, it shall be deemed to have been read the third time;

(6) paragraph (2) of Standing Order 166 relating to Private Business (First reading) shall not apply to any Bill brought from the House of Lords in the present Session and to which this Order relates;

(7) when any Bill which was brought from the House of Lords in the last Parliament and to which this Order relates is brought from the House of Lords in the present Session, the Agent for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration, signed by him, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the House of Lords in the last Parliament and, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office that such a declaration has been so deposited has been laid upon the Table of the House—

(i) unless the Examiner had reported pursuant to Standing Order 74 relating to Private Business (Examination of bills brought from the House of Lords, etc.), the Bill shall stand referred to the Examiners;

(ii) if the Examiner had so reported, the Bill shall be ordered to be read a second time, or, if it had been read a second time, it shall be read a second time and committed; but

(iii) if the Bill had been reported by a Committee with Amendments in the last Parliament it shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means who shall make only such Amendments to the Bill as had been made thereto by the Committee in the last Parliament, and shall report the Bill to the House forthwith, and the Bill shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

(8) any Bill which under the provisions of this Order is deemed to have been read the first time, or the first and second time, or the first, second and third time, shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having been so read;

(9) without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph (5) of this Order, only those Petitions against any Bill which stood referred to the Committee on the Bill and which had not been withdrawn or had been deposited pursuant to paragraph (b) of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business (Reference to committee of petitions against bill) shall stand referred to the Committee on the same Bill in the present Session;

(10) in relation to any Bill to which this Order applies Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business (Right of audience before committees on opposed bills) shall have effect as if the words "under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against bill)" were omitted;

(11) where any Standing Order had been dispensed with in respect of any private Bill in the last Parliament, those Standing Orders shall be deemed to have been ordered to be dispensed with in respect of any such Bill presented or brought from the Lords in pursuance of this Order;

(12) any Standing Orders complied with in respect of any Bill originating in the House of Lords to which this Order relates shall be deemed to have been complied with in respect of such Bill if the same is brought from the House of Lords in the present Session, and any notices published or given and any deposits made in respect of such Bill in the last Parliament shall be held to have been published, given and made, respectively, for the Bill so brought from the House of Lords in the present Session;

(13) no further fees shall be charged in respect of proceedings on a Bill in respect of which fees have been incurred in the last Parliament.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Tuesday 10 June.

WAYS AND MEANS

Sessional Returns

Ordered,

Returns for Session 1996-97 of—

(1) Business of the House;

(2) Closure of Debate and Allocation of Time;

(3) Private Bills and Private Business;

(4) Public Bills;

(5) Sittings of the House;

(6) Special Procedure Orders;

(7) Standing Committees;

(8) Select Committees; and

(9) Delegated Legislation and Deregulation Proposals, &c.

in the same terms as the Orders made on 29th October 1996.—[*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Contingencies Fund Accounts 1995-96

Ordered,

Accounts of the Contingencies Fund, 1995–96, showing:—

(1) The Receipts and Payments in connection with the Fund in the year ended the 31st day of March 1996.

(2) The Distribution of the Capital of the Fund at the commencement and close of the year, with the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon.—[*Mr. Graham Allen.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

Single Regeneration Budget

1. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the publication of regional guidance for those bidding under the single regeneration budget. [444]

The Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): We will publish further guidance to spell out the principles on which the fourth round of the single regeneration budget will be taken forward. Those principles are a requirement that proposals should contribute to our commitment to attack the multiple causes of economic and social decline; a greater emphasis on tackling need; and a requirement that proposals take account of existing strategies for promoting economic development and tackling deprivation.

Mr. Vaz: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment to all three of his new posts? I am sure that he will serve in all of them with great distinction. May I also welcome the Government's emphasis on the regional nature of their guidance? I hope that this is the beginning of a process that will bring an end to the lottery system that has pitted our towns and cities against one another in an unfair competition, and has resulted in great hardship for those who have not been successful. When my right hon. Friend publishes his guidance, will he ensure that it is as accurate and as detailed as possible to make up for the shambles and chaos that has been the hallmark of the Conservative Government's regeneration policies in the past 18 years?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. He has established a considerable reputation on the issue of urban regeneration. I attended many of the conferences that he helped to organise. I assure him that we will not entertain the sort of beauty contest that we had for regeneration schemes under the previous Administration. We are more concerned about how our policy can be developed in the regions, how we should deal with need and the consequences for urban regeneration schemes of the release of capital receipts. Our criteria will be different.

As to the mess created by the previous Administration, if my hon. Friend would like to come and talk to me, perhaps we can spell out in detail how our policies contrast with those of the previous Government.

Mr. Fallon: Will the new guidance include guidance on regional selective assistance? Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether he has succeeded or failed in his attempt to take that responsibility by mugging the President of the Board of Trade?

Mr. Prescott: Our regional schemes will reflect the importance that we attach to regional development, as was shown by our announcement on regional development agencies. That is one of the clear differences between the

policies of the current Government and those of the previous Administration. As to whether grants cause any problems between my right hon. Friend and me, that is merely press gossip. It is easy to reach agreement on these matters to ensure that we have a proper regional policy, so as to achieve greater prosperity in the regions and to get more people back to work. There are regional development agencies for Scotland and Wales, but they were denied to the English regions by the previous Government.

Mr. William O'Brien: When my right hon. Friend reviews the single regeneration budget, will he take into consideration the devastating effect that the pit closure programme has had on many regions? Will he also consider whether the coal-mining industry could be developed in some of the areas in which coal mines have been closed? There is a golden opportunity to create jobs in those areas. There is room for discussion on the development of the coal-mining industry. We should end the lottery of the single regeneration budget. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that areas of gross deprivation are given serious consideration in any changes that he introduces?

Mr. Prescott: Yes, I can assure my hon. Friend that that is what we will want to do.

I do not think that anyone who visits any of the pit areas that have been decimated by the closure of the coal industry can fail to be moved by the desperate circumstances in which the pit villages exist. That is why we need a regional strategy. Regeneration—even the work that has been done by the Coal Board, to a certain extent—needs to be included in the plans for that strategy, so that we can meet the needs caused by the deprivation that has resulted largely from the policies of the last Administration.

Parish Councils

2. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what role he envisages for parish councils in rural areas. [445]

The Minister of State, Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Hilary Armstrong): Parish councils have two main roles: to represent community views and to deliver important local services. They are of particular value in representing and serving small, tightly knit communities in rural areas.

Mr. Spring: Given the Government's clear attack on country pursuits and the rural way of life, may I tell the Minister how much my constituents welcome the recent extension of powers for parish councils in rural areas? They believe that the new powers are the essence of local democracy, and they certainly do not want a regional assembly for East Anglia which would be costly for the taxpayer and would constitute yet another layer of bureaucracy.

Ms Armstrong: Many myths continue to prevail on the Opposition Benches. Perhaps Opposition Members will eventually learn that many people in rural areas voted for Members of Parliament who now sit on the Government Benches.

We made it clear in our manifesto—and my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has made it clear—that regional assemblies will be introduced only if they have the support of local people. People will be given the opportunity to ask for a regional assembly and, indeed, to vote on whether they want one. That, however, is not in the current programme. The current Bill deals only with regional development agencies.

Council House Sale Receipts

3. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from local authorities regarding the phased release of council house sale receipts. [446]

4. **Mr. Rammell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his proposals to release the capital receipts from the sale of council houses. [447]

5. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to release capital receipts for housing. [448]

Mr. Prescott: The Local Government (Supplementary Credit Approvals) Bill lays the basis for the Government's capital receipts initiative. The Bill itself is simply an enabling measure that provides for previously set aside capital receipts to be taken into account when supplementary credit approvals are issued. A consultation document, which will be available shortly, will set out our detailed implementation proposals. We will be considering all representations received during that consultation exercise very carefully. A number of local authorities, however, have already written expressing their support for the initiative.

Mr. Hanson: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on both his appointment and his Bill. Many local authorities will welcome the Bill, as it will give them an opportunity to build houses for rent, to modernise old housing stock and to provide many building workers with real jobs in the community to help to alleviate unemployment. Can my right hon. Friend say how many housing starts he expects in the forthcoming terms of the Labour Government, so that we may compare the Labour Government's record of success with the abject failure of the Conservative Government?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. I assure him that those idle resources can now be used effectively to put people to work and to build houses for those in the community. The measure of the success of that, in terms of both housing and putting people to work, will soon be clearly evident to all who study the position. The amount of resources that will be available—phased in over a period—will be determined in the Budget, and we must therefore wait for the Budget.

Mr. Rammell: I thank my right hon. Friend for his announcement about capital receipts, which is long overdue. People in my constituency, Harlow, have been waiting for 18 years to hear it. I know from experience in my constituency—and, indeed, from work undertaken

recently by the School for Advanced Urban Studies and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation—that people are more likely to remain unemployed, particularly young people, if they are trained only up to NVQ2 level. To get secure long-term employment, training to at least NVQ3 level is necessary. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the release of council receipts will be tied in some way to training provision and NVQ qualifications so that people in my constituency and elsewhere will get the benefit not only of new and renovated homes but of an important step along the road of the Government's programme for welfare into work?

Madam Speaker: The best questions are the very short ones.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend makes an important point which will condition the phasing of the resources. The shortage of skills in the building industry requires to be addressed. We are short of every kind of skill, and that is the legacy of 18 years of Tory government. I assure my hon. Friend that the money will provide not only jobs and homes but will be used to train our people in the proper skills so that they can contribute to providing jobs.

Mr. Hutton: I also warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment. Does he agree that his answers have confirmed the importance that we attach to improving our social housing sector? They will be a welcome boost to the building industry in my constituency and good news for the thousands of families in the Furness area who live in local authority homes.

Mr. Prescott: They will be good news, and I agree with a great deal of what my hon. Friend says. Releasing such resources gives the Government a great opportunity to make changes in various areas. Those changes may be to the quality of houses or to the quality of production in the industry. They will also make a difference to the number of people who are available for training in building industries. The opportunity provided for the industry is that we will be able to guarantee resources over a longer time than the industry would normally expect for its housing programme. That will give a firm start to a good programme for houses and jobs.

Mr. Jack: Can the Secretary of State confirm that the use of capital receipts will represent an increase in public expenditure on current published totals? What will be the effect of their use on the public sector borrowing requirement?

Mr. Prescott: I think that that was supplementary question No.2 in the document that was given to Conservative Back Benchers. *[Interruption.]* Clearly, the use of those receipts will lead to an increase in public expenditure, and we shall have close discussions with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on that matter. Make no mistake about it: we fought an election on the receipts being released to improve housing. That will happen, and in five years the public will judge us not only on public expenditure but on decent housing and on getting people back to work. Those are our criteria.

Mr. William Ross: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Bill that he mentioned is a Great Britain Bill rather than a United Kingdom one. There is also a housing problem in Northern Ireland, especially about repairs. What discussions has he initiated with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ensure that the benefits that will flow from that Bill are also applied in the Province?

Mr. Prescott: Capital receipts in Wales, for example, will be dealt with by the Secretary of State for Wales. They are dealt with differently in Scotland where there will be separate discussions between the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will also conduct such discussions with the Chancellor.

Mr. Maples: The right hon. Gentleman describes the receipts as idle resources. Does he agree that they generate interest which helps to defray interest on outstanding local government loans or, alternatively, help to reduce council tax? If they are spent, the inevitable consequence of the loss of interest is that tax will go up.

Mr. Prescott: Those are the matters of concern which we are discussing with the Chancellor. The constant concerns of Conservative Members are interest payments and money. We are concerned about jobs and houses, and that is the fundamental difference between us.

Mr. Levitt: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the phased release of capital receipts from the sale of council houses will be welcomed throughout the country, not just for the reasons given, but because it will give local authorities the opportunity to refurbish housing stock that has design deficiencies and that, in many cases, has been waiting far too many years for refurbishment? There are examples of that in my constituency. I am sure that councils would also welcome clarification on whether the rules on the spending of those receipts apply in the same way to accumulated receipts as to future receipts.

Mr. Prescott: Like many hon. Members, I have buildings in my constituency that have not been constructed to proper standards and cause great problems. It causes great offence to our constituents when we tell them that we cannot do anything, despite money being available in the accounts. We intend to release it so that we can say to our constituents, "The resources are there. We will put unemployed building workers to work to provide you with housing and refurbishment." This is about quality housing and that is what we intend to have.

Mr. Gummer: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman about future receipts? Will a proportion of the receipts have to be set aside by local authorities, or will they be able to spend them?

Mr. Prescott: Again, the amounts of money that are available to local authorities to spend will be in our proposals on the phased release. It will be depend on those discussions. The amount available in total per year will be divided accordingly. We will make those decisions in good time and inform hon. Members in good time, when we produce the Bill.

Standard Spending Assessments

6. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce measures to increase the total standard spending assessments in areas of high unemployment. [449]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We will introduce measures that will lead to a fairer distribution of grant. Unemployment currently forms part of the economic index used in the calculation of standard spending assessments. That is one of the aspects of SSAs that we are reviewing this year, and we have notified the Local Government Association that we will do so in consultation with the assn. The Government are also committed to supporting areas of high unemployment through the welfare-to-work programme.

Mr. Skinner: Does my hon. Friend recall that, when we were a party of protest for 18 years and sat on the Opposition Benches, we used to regale the Tories and anyone else who cared to listen about the fact that Westminster and Wandsworth were getting money that should have gone to areas of high unemployment and to city areas that were deprived of money? Now that we are no longer a party of protest but a party of power, will my hon. Friend give guarantees, alongside those that he has already given, that areas of high unemployment, such as coalfield areas, will benefit and that places such as Westminster will not get the sort of money that they have received in the past?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. Most fair-minded observers are shocked by a system that ensures that Westminster, which contains some of the most affluent areas in our country, features at number four in the social index ranking, whereas Bolsover features only in 322nd position. That is clearly not a just arrangement and we certainly intend to re-examine Westminster's treatment by the previous Administration.

Mr. David Heath: Will the hon. Gentleman consider the fact that not only urban areas but rural areas suffer from unfairness? One of the major unfairnesses is the area cost adjustment. Will he reopen the review on the basis not of Professor Elliott's review, which, when asked the wrong question produced the wrong answer, but of a fair reflection of the costs of unemployment?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about one of the many intricacies of the local government finance system and he will not be surprised to know that we have entered into discussions with the Local Government Association about a range of issues; indeed we have mentioned the area cost adjustment. However, complex considerations need to be considered carefully and he will understand that we are going to do that before reaching any firm decision on the matter.

Mr. Sutcliffe: I welcome my hon. Friend to his post. In addition to looking at areas of high unemployment with the change in formula, will he look at areas with high ethnic minority populations to ensure that they get a fair share of the redistribution of grant?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend will be aware that the presence of significant numbers of people from ethnic minorities is one of the factors taken into account in the indices used to calculate SSAs. It is one of the considerations that indicate a need for expenditure by local authorities. Clearly, in our review of those indices, we are considering that factor along with the other factors, in particular the issue of unemployment to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred.

Mr. Curry: Will the hon. Gentleman give the House the assurance that if a local authority's SSA reduces because of a change in methodology, that decline will be limited by damping and will he confirm that he will continue the established practice of limiting the reduction to a maximum of 2 per cent?

Mr. Raynsford: I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that we have already mentioned the issue of damping in our preliminary discussions. No decisions have been reached and we will need to discuss all those concerns much more fully with the relevant bodies, in particular the Local Government Association, before we reach final decisions on the review that we are currently undertaking.

Countryside

7. **Mr. Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to begin a process of consultation leading to greater access to the countryside. [450]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): In our manifesto, we made it clear that our policies for the countryside include greater freedom for people to explore our open countryside. We are considering the options for giving effect to our policies, and we intend to issue a consultation paper on our proposals in the summer. The principle of access is not negotiable, but we shall take full account of views expressed about how it should be put into effect. We shall make sure that the measures we introduce are practical and of lasting benefit to the people of this country.

Mr. Tipping: I welcome my right hon. Friend to this important subject. Will he pursue this path with vigour, but be mindful of the obstacles that lie in the way, some of which have been frustrating legislation since 1884? In view of that, will he consult widely so that a balanced view can be reached which listens to all the voices that make demands on the countryside?

Mr. Meacher: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his long-term interest in the subject and his experience last year with his Access to the Countryside Bill. That is experience on which we are building. I take my hon. Friend's point and that is why we have said that we will set in hand a full consultation which will extend through the summer. We will be inviting submissions up to the end of November. We will be listening carefully to all interests because I am aware that this is politically contentious. Having listened to all those interests and

sought to achieve the best consensus we can, we will bring forward legislation, but I believe that it will not be in this Session.

Mr. Sayeed: Does the hon. Gentleman support the right to roam?

Mr. Meacher: Yes.

Mr. Bennett: Will my hon. Friend accept that the best way that people in the countryside, particularly those such as the Country Landowners Association and others, could carry forward the debate would be to encourage far more voluntary access agreements in the next 12 months? That would show good intent on their part and might make negotiations between all the parties much easier.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend is right. I am glad to say that the Country Landowners Association has already provided an initiative by extending voluntary access in a number of cases. I hope to talk to the CLA shortly about the success of those initiatives so that we can build on them. It is also important to look at how those voluntary initiatives, which have been willingly agreed and entered into, can be fitted into the nationwide pattern of access that we are now intending.

Biodiversity

8. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's programme for enhancing biodiversity. [451]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): The Government are fully committed to carrying forward the work of the biodiversity convention, both domestically and internationally. In the UK, our immediate priorities are the implementation of the published species and habitat action plans and the provision of further guidance on local biodiversity action plans. Internationally, the UK has a significant aid programme in support of biodiversity objectives and we will be hosting an international biodiversity workshop in the autumn.

Mr. Boswell: I thank the hon. Lady for her answer. Will she remember, arising from the earlier exchanges, that the interests of biodiversity and access are not always identical? Can the hon. Lady bring herself to pay an appropriate tribute to my right hon. and hon. Friends, particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) for his efforts at the Rio summit and for introducing the biodiversity initiative in this country? Will she also pay tribute to local interests such as non-governmental organisations and the voluntary sector as well as local authorities for taking these matters forward?

Finally, does the hon. Lady accept our assurance that if she takes the programmes forward and continues to resource and encourage them, she will have wide support in all parts of the House?

Angela Eagle: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I am only too happy to pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal for the work that he did in this important area. However, success depends on partnerships at both national and local level. While we are delivering the 116 endangered species action plans and the habitat protection plans, we must remember that there are other important issues, such as the reform of the common agricultural policy and global pollution and we will be taking action on those matters in the next few months. I look forward to the Opposition's support in all those areas.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: In the approach to the United Nations General Assembly special session, one contentious issue for developing countries will be the lack of financial support from the developed world for their work on biodiversity. Will the Minister work with the Department for International Development to secure additional funds for that work from the United Kingdom? We could then play a leading role in taking forward biodiversity internationally and in helping those developing countries, rather than simply watching them destroy the natural rain forests and other unique habitats.

Angela Eagle: Partnership at both national and global level is crucial if there is to be reasonable progress. My Department is already working closely with the new Department for International Development to take forward the important issues referred to by the hon. Gentleman, with whose observations I agree. Work is continuing and I hope that it will reach a reasonable conclusion at many of the international forums to which we will be contributing over the next year and beyond.

Mr. Soames: Will the hon. Lady deal with the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) about how she believes it will be possible easily to enhance greater biodiversity in, for example, the uplands of Britain if there is to be unrestrained access?

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is exaggerating—in line with his very exaggerated personality—the implications of the right to roam as expressed by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment in his earlier answer. We are talking not about unrestricted access, but about access to the countryside—with that right to access being balanced by a responsibility to look after the countryside when one is in it. We are undertaking extensive consultation on the matter. The hon. Gentleman should not exaggerate to make a point.

Mr. Clappison: I congratulate the hon. Lady on her appointment and thank her for her generous tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal, which I believe was appropriate.

I urge the hon. Lady to stick to the conservation targets contained in the biodiversity action plans. Will she give priority to encouraging other countries to follow our lead, especially through measures such as the Darwin initiative?

Angela Eagle: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that I agree with much of what he said and also to confirm my earlier tribute. I was interested to discover that the Darwin initiative is, as we speak, exporting British knowledge and expertise. For example, it is currently involved in a scheme for the sustainable support of—*[Interruption.]* No, not birds, but seahorses in the Philippines.

Mobile Telephone Masts

9. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that areas of outstanding natural beauty and other sensitive areas are protected from the effects of commercial development in the form of mobile telephone masts. [452]

The Minister of State, Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Richard Caborn): The Government are committed to protecting the environment, particularly areas of outstanding natural beauty and other protected areas where development can be intrusive. In my Department's "Planning Policy Guidance Note 8: Telecommunications", we encourage local planning authorities to propose specific policies in their development plans for siting telecommunications development, having regard to the Department's guidance on the need to protect the environment.

Mr. Jenkin: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment and thank him for his response. May I also press him—as I pressed Ministers in the previous Government—on the concerns expressed in my constituency over imminent development, pending a planning inquiry, in what is known as Constable country? Does he agree that development of telecommunications masts in that area would be inappropriate? Will he stand by the assurance given by his predecessor that masts, even if they are sited outside an AONB, should be a material consideration for the planning inquiry to consider if they loom over an AONB?

Mr. Caborn: I can understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, as he has long been campaigning on that issue. He will know that the previous Government initiated consultation. That is now almost complete, and the results should be on my desk in the next few weeks. I shall ensure that my Department corresponds with him on the findings. It would be wrong for me to intervene now in any planning inquiry, but I shall consider seriously any results that I receive. There should be discussions with the industry on whether we can rationalise some of the carrying equipment so that there is joint rather than single use, which I know has been one of his concerns.

TRANSPORT

Air Transport Strategy

29. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans to develop a national air transport strategy. [474]

Mr. Prescott: The Government will pursue aviation policies that support United Kingdom industry and benefit the consumer. Over the coming weeks, I shall be examining the role of aviation within our overall transport policies.

Mr. Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and I add my congratulations on his appointment. I am sure that he will acknowledge the significance of regional airports as an important part of the nation's transport infrastructure. Will he therefore ensure that their importance across the UK and internationally is rightly reflected in his aviation strategy?

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks and I can assure him that the regional dimension of most decisions—whether they are on the environment or transport issues—will be considered very seriously. Regional airports have a major part to play and they were identified in the 1985 airports policy White Paper. We are continuing to ensure that they play an important part in UK aviation policy.

Mr. Chidgey: In his strategy, does the Deputy Prime Minister recognise the threat to our environment caused by the increase in air travel? Does he realise that a key factor in controlling that environmental impact is control and management of surface access to airports? In his strategy, does he therefore have plans to limit surface access by private cars—belonging not only to passengers but to staff—and to direct investment into attractive and affordable public transport links to our airports? Specifically, does he plan to switch investment from the proposed widening of the M25 to rejuvenating the much-desired crossrail project?

Mr. Prescott: Those are serious questions in any transport policy review and the connection between aviation, rail and road—the aspects of any integrated policy—must be considered. I hope soon to make a statement on what we mean by an integrated transport policy. *[Laughter.]* Yes, those have often been used as buzzwords, often by Conservative Members, but we intend to define their meaning. If any satisfaction can be found in controlling the environmental problems that have resulted from the Conservatives' privatisation of the public transport system, it is absolutely essential that we do so. The M25 widening and a spur to terminal 5 are important issues and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport will be commenting on the review of the roads programme. We wish, however, to connect and improve public transport to our airports as much as we want to improve access by motor vehicles.

Sir George Young: I welcome the members of the new transport team to their first Transport Questions and congratulate Ministers on their appointments. On air transport, will the Deputy Prime Minister now resolve the total confusion that arose during the general election campaign over the Labour party's policy on national air traffic control? Does he plan to privatise it or not?

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's kind comments about me and the team. The confusion arose from the previous Government's original decision that no statement was to be made about air traffic control until the House had been informed about any public interest and safety. As the right hon. Gentleman wholly failed to make such a statement, we are making that assessment. A decision will be made at the appropriate time.

Road Investment

30. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on current levels of investment in the trunk road and motorway systems. [475]

The Minister of Transport (Dr. Gavin Strang): Provision for investment in improvement and maintenance of the trunk roads network in England for 1997-98 is some £1,491 million net. We are, however, committed to carrying out a strategic review of the trunk roads programme.

Mrs. Winterton: In view of the importance of road infrastructure investment, especially to a strong and growing economy inherited from the previous Government, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that spending pledges made before 1 May will be honoured? Will he reassure my constituents in Cheshire and people elsewhere that the widening of the M6 will go ahead as planned on time?

Dr. Strang: I am a little surprised at the hon. Lady's remarks. She was a supporter of a Government who massively cut the roads programme, not on the basis of an objective analysis of the relative merits of various schemes but on the basis of a need simply to cut public expenditure. I assure her that we shall adopt a much more balanced approach to those matters. We shall take into account a range of factors and we shall certainly stand by all the pledges that we gave during the general election campaign.

Mr. Kidney: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, despite what the hon. Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) said, many people are opposed to the widening of the M6, not only on environmental grounds but on strategic ones relating to the road network, especially around the north of Birmingham? Is my right hon. Friend also aware that, while the outcome of the discussions is awaited, the money spent on widening the M6 could be more usefully spent on modernising the west coast main line, which is next to the M6?

Dr. Strang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. Those are important decisions and I can assure him that we shall be taking into account accessibility, safety, economy and, as he said, perhaps above all, the environmental impact.

Mr. Key: I must acknowledge in all fairness that these are early days, but will the Minister give us some flavour of his own thinking on the possibility of urban and inter-urban motorway and trunk road pricing as a way of securing investment?

Dr. Strang: The hon. Gentleman will accept that, in the first instance, we have to carry out a fundamental review of the roads programme. Of course, when it comes to spending on roads, and especially public transport as we are determined to have an integrated transport policy, we shall have to examine a range of issues.

M25

31. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to review the proposed widening of the M25. [476]

Mr. Prescott: The widening of the M25 between junctions 8 and 10, which is under construction, will continue. We intend to announce shortly our proposals for reviewing the trunk roads programme, including other M25 schemes.

Mr. Mackinlay: I greatly welcome the review, but will my right hon. Friend give a specific commitment that, should the grotesque proposed widening of the M25 to 10 lanes between junctions 12 and 14 and to 12 lanes between junctions 14 and 15 proceed, at his instruction, it will be, in contrast to what happened before, the subject of a planning inquiry which was denied the objectors by the previous Government? It is crucial that there should be scrutiny and accountability. In the meantime, will the grotesque widening proposals be the subject of the review to which my right hon. Friend just referred?

Mr. Prescott: The issue is the review into those major trunkways. We shall make an announcement about that review. When we have made those decisions, other matters relating to whether planning inquiries go ahead will depend on the judgment of the review.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will the Deputy Prime Minister consider the effect of Heathrow-bound traffic on the density of traffic in the M25 area, particularly to the west of London? Will he bear in mind both the possibility of a fifth terminal bringing yet more traffic on to the M25 if it is approved and the need for improved rail access, even after the completion of the high-speed link to Paddington, westwards to Langley and the west country and south-eastwards to Waterloo and beyond?

Mr. Prescott: With his specialised knowledge of the aviation industry, the hon. Gentleman puts his finger on an important point about connections to airports. The widening of the M25 near the spur to the Heathrow terminal is an important issue, although it is not directly connected to the inquiry. I shall have to consider the proposals that come out of the terminal 5 inquiry. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Transport will consider the review of the widening of the M25. The important point is to ask whether we can integrate better and use other forms of public connections to railways, and not only for Heathrow. We shall put our minds to those issues, which are essential for anyone who believes in an integrated transport policy.

Rail Electrification

32. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to assist electrification of the main railway line from Paddington to south Wales and the west. [477]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): The United Kingdom has secured £0.65 million of European Union funding for a study of potential

improvements to the Great Western line. The study is being carried out by Railtrack and is already under way. The Government are committed to the railway network being run in the public interest with higher levels of investment and we are considering how best to achieve that.

Mr. Morgan: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her new job. Will she confirm that the service between London Paddington and Bristol, Cardiff and Swansea is the last major inter-city line in western Europe that uses diesel, not electricity? The GWR company can improve its livery, but it cannot improve delivery under the current technology. Does she agree that, until it goes electric, the initials GWR will stand, not, as they did in the old days, for God's wonderful railway, but for a godawful woeful railway?

Ms Jackson: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome. I reiterate our central commitment to ensuring that the vast amounts of public money that are still going to our railways should produce the best quality public services. My understanding is that, as part of a 10-year plan, Great Western Trains will invest up to £30 million to deliver a more flexible rolling stock fleet. It is part of our commitment to creating a genuine public service on our railways that all franchisees will be closely monitored to ensure that they meet the commitments that they have given.

Sir George Young: Will the Minister explain how the higher levels of investment to which she has just committed herself will be assisted by a windfall tax on Railtrack?

Ms Jackson: I find it astonishing that the right hon. Gentleman, who, as Secretary of State for Transport, oversaw the profligate waste of taxpayers' money on rail privatisation, including £450 million for consultancy fees alone, should make such a point. I repeat that the Government are committed to the vast amounts of public money that are still going into our railway system being used to produce the highest quality services.

Transport Policies

33. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to encourage environmentally sustainable transport policies. [478]

Mr. Prescott: Protection and enhancement of the environment will be at the heart of our approach to government. We shall develop an integrated transport policy designed to provide genuine choice to meet people's future needs in line with our overall goal of environmentally sustainable economic and social development.

Mr. Yeo: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the best ways to promote sustainability is through greater use of market instruments?

Mr. Prescott: People in any of our major cities around the country, which have been subjected to the privatisation of the bus services, leading to the choking of much of our city space, will not agree with that policy. Integration of our transport system means a better use of public and private transportation and will be better for the environment. When we make our statement on integration, the hon. Gentleman will be able to make a judgment on it.

Mrs. Brinton: What plans does my right hon. Friend have to encourage alternative forms of transport to work other than the car, especially in view of the fact that the previous Administration ran down public transport, particularly buses, in such a shameful fashion?

Mr. Prescott: The House will be glad to see my hon. Friend in her place today in view of the unfortunate accident she suffered on the London underground. Both sides of the House will agree that we must do as much as we can to improve the safety of transport; that will be at the heart of our approach. Improving safety is one important aspect on which we shall spend some time.

The major point that concerns us is that, although we have fewer cars per head than most other countries, we use them more. That is a reflection of our poor public transport system, which we intend to improve.

M4

34. **Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish new plans for the proposed M4-A34 interchange at Chieveley. [479]

Dr. Strang: In view of the strategic review of the roads programme, it is too early to say what our plans for this interchange will be.

Mr. Rendel: Does the Minister accept that although this interchange programme is not needed for the Newbury bypass, it will have a significant effect in my area in that there is an increase in rat running down the B4000 through Stockcross and down the A4 through Thatcham to get to the interchanges on either side of interchange 13? Therefore, the sooner that we go ahead with this programme, the better.

Dr. Strang: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says; I know of the interest he has taken in the matter. As he knows, a national scheme was published for the improvement of the interchange, but, because it is envisaged that it will be a long time before the scheme is started—as the hon. Gentleman would expect, the interchange will be part of the review—there will be an impact on the timing of any interim improvement scheme for the roundabout.

Railways (East Sussex)

35. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he plans to take to encourage greater use of railways in East Sussex; and if he will make a statement. [480]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Our objective for the whole of the passenger network is to see more people travelling by rail. We want higher levels of investment, proper

enforcement of train operators' service commitments and all the benefits of having a national railway network. We are considering what action is necessary to achieve those things.

Mr. Baker: Does the Minister recognise that, under the previous Government, money spent on roads was called investment whereas money spent on rail was called subsidy? There is a need to redress that balance. Is she aware that, in my constituency of Lewes, there is considerable potential for increased rail traffic, especially along the corridor from Lewes to Polegate, where the previous Government identified a multi-million-pound dual carriageway scheme, but had no plans for the railway? Will she work with me to secure investment in the local railway system and cheaper fares for the public? In view of the great importance of transport issues for my constituents, will she or the Secretary of State agree to an early meeting with me to discuss the issues in more detail?

Ms Jackson: To answer the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, yes, I should be delighted to have a meeting with him. I well remember my visit to his constituency before the general election. I am aware that there is great popular feeling in his constituency about the extension of what people regard as existing infrastructure which could be patched in to the main line. I would be very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman.

Channel Tunnel Rail Links

36. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans his Department has to ensure that trains coming from the channel tunnel will be able to (a) continue north of London and (b) link with modernised services to (i) Scotland, (ii) Wales and (iii) the north of England. [481]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that London and Continental Railways, owners of Eurostar UK Ltd., plans to start regional channel tunnel services to and from Paris this year.

Mr. Connarty: I welcome my hon. Friend to her new starring role. Does she share my concern that, on the information I have, there will be no link between Manchester and Glasgow on the west coast line for the Eurostar service? Can she give the people and businesses of Scotland, Wales and northern England some assurance that the franchise company now running the former British Rail services will provide a rail track north of London that will be capable of bearing the speeds that are expected from the Eurotunnel-London rail link?

Ms Jackson: I thank my hon. Friend for his greeting, albeit that I believe that I have a supporting as opposed to a starring role. We are extremely pleased that LCR lodged an application in January for a Transport and Works Act 1992 order. The application is to deal with the proposed new station at Stratford and its commitment to ensuring that Eurostar trains can, indeed, service our regions. That is inherent in the application for the order, which also carries with it a commitment to build a spur from the west coast main line to the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Butterfill: Does the hon. Lady recognise that it is not only Scotland, Wales and the north, where the Labour strongholds are, that have an interest in Eurostar services, but the south-west of England, especially my constituency of Bournemouth?

Ms Jackson: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that this Government came to power committed to govern for most of the people, regardless of where they live.

Dr. Marek: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her appointment. Does she agree that it is necessary for people to be able to buy tickets easily for Eurostar trains that go north of London? Through ticketing should be available and it should be possible for the public to use the trains that go through the tunnel to travel between different parts of the United Kingdom, instead of being able to get on them only at Crewe, Manchester or Birmingham. We need a much more easily used railway system than we have at present for such services to be a success.

Ms Jackson: My hon. Friend makes a point that the whole Government strongly endorse. We are committed to ensuring that we have linkages that facilitate the ease of passengers, on trains and throughout a multi-modal system. We shall work with everyone concerned to produce that situation soon. One philosophical difference between this Government and the Tories is that we believe that public transport modes should co-operate, not compete, with each other for the benefit of the travelling public.

Sir Robert Smith: In the light of that philosophy, will the Minister consider seriously the electrification of the east coast main line to Aberdeen, which is another intercity link that is connected only by diesel to Europe? Is she aware that electrification would greatly increase the chance of piggyback freight and other forms of freight using the rail link?

Ms Jackson: I repeat that the Government are committed to seeing greater levels of investment in our railway network. My understanding is that Railtrack Freight is already conducting an inquiry into the possibilities of piggyback. When it finishes that survey, it will be presented to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and our auditors will look at it.

M66

37. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the M66 from Denton to Middleton to open. [483]

Dr. Strang: As I said earlier, we are committed to a strategic review of the trunk road programme. A key early decision will be on how to handle those schemes at or near construction, of which the M66 scheme is a prime example.

Mr. Bennett: Will my right hon. Friend accept that there was great disappointment in Tameside at the delay in letting the final contract for the scheme? The traffic congestion caused by the failure to complete it has caused great anxiety to my constituents. Will he give an assurance that it will be completed at an early date?

Dr. Strang: My hon. Friend is right and I am well aware of the importance, to Manchester and surrounding

areas, of the scheme, which would effectively complete an outer-city bypass for Manchester. He has taken a great interest in the scheme and I assure him that we shall soon announce those schemes on which we shall have to take decisions in advance of the review.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: How will the Minister justify continuing to answer for the Government on English roads as a Scottish Member of Parliament, when he supports proposals that would deny any say to Welsh and English Members on roads in Scotland? Does he think that that is a sustainable proposition?

Dr. Strang: This is the United Kingdom Parliament, which includes England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and I am privileged to serve in it.

Speed Limits

38. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to review existing maximum speed limits. [484]

Dr. Strang: Speed contributes to a third of all road accidents. I am concerned to reduce its impact and I shall consider a range of measures to manage speed, including speed limits.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I welcome my right hon. Friend to his new post. Is he aware of the increasing numbers of people, especially the elderly, who are effectively trapped in their own homes, as they are unable to cross nearby roads because of the speed and intensity of local traffic? Will he consider the proposal made by one of his predecessors, as an Opposition spokesman, to reduce speed limits outside all schools to 20 mph, which would immediately improve the safety of many children and young people?

Dr. Strang: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who raises a number of very important points. I should point out to him—this covers part of what he said—that the failure to observe the 30 mph speed limit in our urban areas is of particular concern. That speed limit is frequently ignored and often a contributor to accidents.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Given that the speed limit on motorways is only 70 mph but on winding roads in Dorset, for instance, it is 60 mph, should we not be considering raising the maximum speed limit on motorways and other such roads and bringing some sense to what seems a nonsensical set of speed limits?

Dr. Strang: I cannot see a case for raising speed limits. Something like a third of all accidents are caused by excessive speed. Road accident statistics for 1996 have not yet been published, but in 1995, 1,200 people were killed in accidents associated with speeding.

Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill (Allocation of Time)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Donald Dewar): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill:—

Committee

1.—(1) Proceedings in Committee shall be completed at the sittings this day and tomorrow.

(2) At the sitting this day, proceedings on any amendments to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would amend that Clause at any place before the word 'Scotland' at line 6 of page 1 of the Bill,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Seven o'clock.

(3) At the sitting this day, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would leave out the word 'Scotland' at line 6 of page 1 of the Bill and insert other words in its place,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Eight o'clock.

(4) At the sitting tomorrow, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would leave out the words 'and tax-varying powers of a Scottish Parliament' at lines 6 and 7 of page 1 of the Bill and insert other words in their place,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Four o'clock.

(5) At the sitting tomorrow, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would leave out only the words 'tax-varying powers' at line 6 of page 1 of the Bill and insert other words in their place,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at Six o'clock.

(6) At the sitting tomorrow, the remaining proceedings on Clause 1 and proceedings on any amendments to Clause 2—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would amend the Bill at any place before the word 'propositions' at line 7 of page 2 of the Bill,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at a quarter past Six o'clock.

(7) At the sitting tomorrow, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 2—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would leave out the word 'propositions' at line 7 of page 2 of the Bill,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at Eight o'clock.

(8) At the sitting tomorrow, the remaining proceedings in Committee shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Eight o'clock.

(9) On the conclusion of the proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question and, if he reports the Bill with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

Report and Third Reading

2. The proceedings on Consideration and on Third Reading shall be completed at the sitting tomorrow and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

Conclusion of proceedings

3.—(1) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 or 2, the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) If, apart from this sub-paragraph, two or more Questions would fall to be put by the Chairman under sub-paragraph (1)(d) in relation to successive Clauses and Schedules, the Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those Clauses and Schedules.

(3) If at the sitting tomorrow

(a) a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over to Seven o'clock, and

(b) proceedings to which this Order applies have begun before that time,

the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings at that sitting in accordance with paragraph 1 or 2 shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion; and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to remaining proceedings that day on the Bill then being considered.

Order of proceedings

4. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken.

Dilatory motions

5. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time

6. The following business shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House and may be decided, though opposed, at any hour—

(a) proceedings under paragraph 3(1) or (2);

(b) proceedings to which paragraph 3(3) applies;

(c) proceedings under paragraph 8(1).

Business Committee

7. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

Supplemental orders

8.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced.

(2) If at the sitting this day or tomorrow the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion under paragraph 1 or 2, no notice

shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Recommittal

9.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on Consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages, respectively, for, on or in consequence of recommittal.

(2) No debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Today's Question Time has confirmed our worst fears that the decision to merge the Departments of the Environment and of Transport has led to a significant reduction in Back Benchers' opportunities to question Ministers on matters of crucial importance to our constituents. In a rural constituency such as mine, environment and transport issues matter. My constituents are more concerned with the funding of local authority and rural schools than they are, with the best will in the world, with international development. As usual, the decision was taken without consulting the House. Ministers took the decision no doubt to solve a diplomatic problem concerning the Deputy Prime Minister. May I urge you, Madam Speaker, to use the influence that you have in this area to reverse the decision?

Madam Speaker: I have no authority over the allocation of time for departmental matters. The President of the Council will in due course be at the Dispatch Box, when the hon. Gentleman might like to put a question to her.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will recall points of order being raised about reading during Question Time. I believe that you indicated that it was acceptable if someone referred to notes. I noticed today that, once again, when an hon. Member referred to notes, a few hon. Members called out, "Reading." Will you protect Back Benchers and allow them to refer to notes during Question Time if they feel it necessary?

Madam Speaker: I have already given a ruling that it is of course occasionally possible to glance at notes. I am particularly tolerant with new hon. Members and I hope that other long-standing hon. Members will be a little tolerant about such matters, too.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I hope that you will be able to help the House. My point concerns the change in time allowed for Question Time. About 18 months ago, an hour was allocated to Environment questions and the then Opposition asked whether that could be changed to 40 minutes, because it would help them. We agreed, on the basis that it is normally felt that Question Time should be particularly affected by the needs of the Opposition. That has been historically so.

No such discussions have taken place recently, and that is a pity. Could you find some way of trying to ensure that once again hon. Members on both sides of the House feel that the allocation of time for questions is not a matter of a diktat? I should have liked to retain an hour for Environment questions, but because the then Opposition wanted a change, we accepted it. Could you use your good offices in this area?

Madam Speaker: I dislike repeating myself. The right hon. Gentleman is aware that I am not consulted about a change in time. I take his point and repeat that the President of the Council will be answering such questions soon. I appeal to him to use his good offices, too, through the usual channels. I shall do what I can myself.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of clarification, Madam Speaker. It has been suggested that today's allocation of time motion will prevent individual votes on any amendments other than the first amendment in any group. Is that the case?

Madam Speaker: What is usual on a guillotine is that it depends on the progress made and on the Chairman of Ways and Means or whichever Deputy Speaker is in the Chair. It depends on progress, and the more points of order we have, the less progress we shall make.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. An extremely important new clause has been tabled, dealing with the threshold for majorities that would be taken into account in deciding whether a referendum was to be effective. A similar amendment was ultimately defeated under the previous Labour Government and led to that Government's fall. Do you accept that it is outrageous that under the present arrangements for the allocation of time, that new clause will effectively fall and there will be no vote on those important matters?

Madam Speaker: That is not a matter for me. I repeat that the more points of order we have, the less time we shall have for debating those matters.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Last night, when a statement was made about the business of the House for today, I asked whether you had any role in safeguarding the position of Back Benchers. Clearly, my question was addressed through you to the Leader of the House; I now address it directly to you. Bearing in mind the fact that a unique situation on a constitutional Bill has resulted from the Government's decision, do you have any role in safeguarding the ability of Back Benchers to speak on a Bill which, although it is only a referendum Bill, clearly has vital implications for subsequent legislation?

Madam Speaker: I have always attempted to safeguard the interests of Back Benchers. Guillotines are carried out under our Standing Orders, and I repeat that the longer hon. Members raise points of order and do not debate the issues on the Floor of the House, the worse the position is for them. I hope that we can now get on with the guillotine motion and move on to amendments. If we do not take up all the three hours on the guillotine, we can move on to the amendments.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sorry to try your patience,

[Mr. Peter Luff]

but my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) asked you earlier about the ability of the House to put to the vote individual amendments within the selected groups, and it is my understanding, from a reading of the motion before us, that only the first amendment in any group can be voted on, unless proposed by a Minister of the Crown. That is clearly unacceptable: it means that four of my amendments will not only be inadequately debated, but cannot be voted on.

Madam Speaker: That normally happens when we discuss legislation that is under guillotine. That has happened over many years. The hon. Gentleman has been in the House when we have dealt with legislation under guillotine. It is a normal practice and how it works out depends on who is in the Chair at the time and on whether hon. Members wish to use up time by dividing the House.

Mr. Dewar: I thank you, Madam Speaker.

I am very conscious of the fact that the clock ticks and that someone moving a motion of this kind should do so, I hope, with conviction and with persuasion, but certainly quickly. The quickly part is not necessarily built into my natural mode, but I intend to be up and down reasonably sharply on this occasion.

I am also very conscious of the fact that guillotine motions are never popular. This is the first one that I have ever had to move, although I have been on the receiving end on many occasions, as Conservative Members will know.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dewar: No, I think that we should make a little progress.

I listened with particular care to the exchanges when the business statement was made last night. I am not totally persuaded that precedent is the only way in which to proceed. If we relied entirely on precedent, we would live in a very ossified society, because we could never do anything that had not been done before, and I am not sure that that would be a recipe for a live and lively democracy. Therefore, I am not entirely persuaded that we should rely on precedent in the matter.

However, I am entitled to draw the attention of the House to the fact that our action is not unprecedented, and that this is not a case of pushing something through in a way never thought, dreamt of or dared before, nor of the bulldozing of Parliament by a bullying Executive. What we are doing does not fall into any of those categories. It seems to me that the whiff of constitutional outrage that was allowed to drift round the Chamber yesterday can quickly be dispersed when one begins to look at the facts.

Opposition Members, including those who have been involved in Conservative Administrations, will know that they have often used guillotine motions as a way of managing the business of the House. I make no complaint about that; no doubt on occasion the present Government will feel it necessary to do the same. That is part of our constitutional machinery.

As I understand it, the particular complaint here is that a guillotine to govern a Committee stage has never been tabled before the start of that Committee stage.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Not on constitional matters.

Mr. Dewar: Now we are beginning to change the script. The former Home Secretary may have saved me some time, because I was about to read out an enormous list of occasions when, under the Conservative Government, a timetable motion to guarantee progress during Committee stage was tabled before that Committee stage started.

I am thinking, for example, of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill, the Local Government Finance Bill, the Further and Higher Education Bill—*[Interruption.]* Let me draw attention—

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I shall let the hon. Gentleman intervene in a little while, but the Statutory Sick Pay Bill and the Social Security (Contributions) Bill are burnt into my memory. I happened to be the Opposition spokesman on both—they were both important Bills that shifted a substantial financial burden on to industry. With both, a timetable not only governed the Committee stage, but took them through all their stages from Second Reading to Third Reading in one day. On successive days, both went through.

I do not know the reason for that, but it puts into perspective some of the remarks made during our exchanges last night that on occasion, although not universally, struck me as having a touch of humbug—

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Fallon *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I shall make one final point before I take a couple of points of information. In order to avoid the catalogue of examples, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who will open for the Opposition, said very precisely, "Not on a constitutional Bill." He said that there was no precedent on a constitutional Bill.

We can argue about the status of the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill, but there can be no doubt that in 1978 the House, rightly or wrongly, passed two enormously important constitutional Acts—the Scotland Act 1978 and the Wales Act 1978—most of the proceedings on which took place under timetable motions regulating the Committee stage. Those motions were debated and agreed before the Committee stages started.

We cannot allow the myth to be perpetrated that what we are doing has never been done before, and that we are plunging into some sort of new jungle territory where democracy will die among the snakes. Things are not like that at all, and hon. Members should recognise the fact.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I am delighted to see that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) is smiling.

Mr. Cash: In an attempt to penetrate the Scotch mist, may I invite the right hon. Gentleman to answer the

question that I asked the Leader of the House yesterday, which she persistently refused to answer. Does he accept that the Bill is what is known in "Erskine May" and in our precedents as a first-class constitutional Bill, because it affects the integrity of the United Kingdom Parliament in its sovereign functions? If so, does he therefore accept that it is a Bill that should be treated in a proper manner, and not, as the Government are treating it, in the manner of a Stalinist dictatorship, because they are determined to have their own way at all costs? Is it not a disgrace that the Bill should be the subject of a guillotine before we have even had a chance to examine its merits?

Mr. Dewar: For one hopeful happy moment, I thought that I was about to be compared with the late J. Stalin. As a former Chief Whip, I might have thought that a compliment.

May I say to the hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I will answer the question, which takes me nicely on from the precedent argument to the status of the Bill. We could dance on the head of a pin about whether this is a constitutional Bill, but one thing cannot be denied: it is not a Bill that seeks to alter the constitution. That is the key point.

In a particularly pained contribution last night, the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), whose sincerity about these matters I have genuinely admired for many years, talked about this Bill in terms that made it clear that he was classing it with the devolution Bill that may follow if the referendums approve the Government's proposals. If we were talking about that Bill, we should be in a very different situation, but this is a paving measure which deals with organising the ballot and putting in place the machinery for counting votes. It is a simple Bill that follows almost exactly the precedents of the 1975 European referendum and the 1978-79 devolution referendums. Other than paving the way for an expression of opinion by the people of Scotland and Wales, it does not in any way alter this country's constitution. The comparison with the devolution Bill itself is false and mistaken.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex) *rose—*

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I cannot resist giving way.

Mr. Jenkin: Which of us is the more resistible?

Mr. Dewar: I give way to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Mr. Jenkin: If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that this is only a minor paving measure, why did he bother to have the Committee stage on the Floor at all? Will he undertake that the main measures will be taken on the Floor with a timetable agreed with Her Majesty's Opposition, to ensure that the whole Bill gets proper scrutiny?

Mr. Dewar: We are damned if we do, damned if we do not with the hon. Gentleman. He is a most contrary man, although often entertaining. We decided to take the matter on the Floor. We thought that it would please Conservative Members and ensure that we made proper progress to allowing the Bill to move on to another place. I hope that we can advance to the sort of test of consent that I thought that the Opposition approved of, and which they certainly called for often enough in the pre-general election period. We should not be open to criticism because we are allowing—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is turning modest. I do not think it a criticism that we are taking the Bill on the Floor, where he, too, can take part without any inhibitions. I am sure that he will.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the right hon. Gentleman remember that the Jopling Committee, on which there was a substantial Conservative majority, considered not only the precedents, but how the House could more expeditiously deal with such business? Its report stated:

"The evidence given to us on timetabling of bills was 'almost without exception in favour of its more general use."

More importantly, it stated:

"The arguments in favour of the proper scrutiny of all parts of a bill are compelling; and timetables applied from an early stage after second reading are probably the best way".

I note that the former Conservative Leader of the House strongly favoured that recommendation.

Mr. Dewar: I am well aware of the Jopling report and that we have moved some way to meeting some of its recommendations. It suggested that the timetabling of all Committee stages would be a sensible approach to the business of the House, which would allow good order and better government, and which would let people know exactly where they were and when matters of interest were likely to arise. That is a matter for further consideration. It would not be fair for me to pray it in aid, except spiritually, on this occasion. I am sure that the matter will be discussed by the Select Committee on parliamentary procedure, which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House hopes to have operating shortly. The recommendation points the way forward and is interesting in the context of this argument.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I must move on. I promised to be quick, but I have taken many interventions.

My first point was simple. This is a paving Bill for the purpose that I described. The second is that in discussing our way forward, we relied on the realities and the common sense of the situation. We have a Bill, which no doubt hon. Members who have the staying power to have stayed for so long will have looked at carefully. They will have seen that it is a modest measure dealing with the mechanics of the referendum. It runs to six clauses and two schedules. It has attracted 250 amendments plus 25 new clauses and 12 new schedules. I congratulate the Opposition. They are obviously in a rather machismo stage of their political development on the Opposition Benches. In all fairness to them, they have got organised. It is clear that there was an agreement that they would attempt to dig in and obstruct this measure.

I make no complaint about that. I have been involved in that sort of exercise in my time. I do not live in the unreal world of imagining that that is beyond

[Mr. Dewar]

the competence or wit of even this Opposition. I am sure that it is not, and we shall probably see plenty of evidence of their ability to engage in such an exercise in future.

I do complain, however, that the Opposition should try to pretend that it is terrible when the Government, recognising what is happening, take steps to deal with what is afoot and to preserve proper progress for their business. That seems to be common sense and something that should cause no surprise to anyone who is being frank about his expectations on the Conservative Benches.

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman has made much of the fact that the proposed legislation and the devolution legislation to follow it will follow closely the precedent established in 1977 and 1978. Is he able to confirm that the motion before us allows no time for debating the thresholds for the necessary majority, which ended up as such an important part of the future of the earlier legislation to which I have referred?

Mr. Dewar: I suspect that what we manage to debate will depend entirely on how much time we spend on these matters. The sooner we get on with the real debates, the better I shall be pleased.

We were faced with an organised move to block and obstruct. We decided that it was better to go for a timetable motion. We thought that there was an additional advantage in taking that course, in that rather than having a chaotic passage of arms over an indefinite period, we would try to arrange the motion in a way that at least allowed for a number of the important issues related specifically to the referendum to be properly ventilated. That is what we have tried to do.

I do not think that anyone will be over-anxious to discover that a number of the more esoteric amendments have fallen by the wayside. We have tried to ensure that the matters that are relevant to the referendum are debated and that there is not simply a reprise of what will be extensive debate if and when we reach the devolution Bill. That is exactly what we have tried to do, and it is what a responsible Opposition would do.

It is significant—I do not want to put too much of a burden on the Opposition's shoulders—that often when there is talk about bulldozing democracy and oppressing minorities, the smaller parties understandably find themselves caught between a rock and a hard place. It is significant also that at least in broad terms, the Scottish National party, the Liberal Democrats and so on have indicated—

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I say to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) that I have a broad embrace and take in all the parties. I am happy that we have the broad support of the smaller parties on this matter.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon). After all, he has returned to the House.

Mr. Fallon: Will the Minister confirm that no more than half of the amendments tabled have been selected? Is he not now enunciating a rather dangerous doctrine that it is the job of the Leader of the House or himself, rather than that of the Chairman of Ways and Means, to decide which amendments should be accepted and included in debate, or squeezed out by the terms of a timetable motion?

Mr. Dewar: I suppose that that is an argument, but one that I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman would want to endorse, for banning any form of timetable motion. The selection of amendments is not a matter for me and certainly not a matter for me to comment on. I should be in hot water very quickly if I presumed so to comment and I have no intention of running that self-evident risk.

I accept, of course, that a framework restricts. If we want to avoid that, we should avoid the exercise that has clearly been mounted against this small, technical Bill. It is an exercise in obstruction.

Sir Patrick Cormack *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: Let me finish, because I promised to be brief. I have argued that there are precedents in plenty. The Bill would not alter the constitution: it is not a constitutional measure, which is how it has been represented. I point to the overwhelming evidence that an organised attempt has, perfectly legitimately, been made—and equally legitimately met—to obstruct the Bill as distinct from properly debating it.

I should remind the House, even if I do not receive a sympathetic hearing, that our manifesto pledge is important to us. When challenged by Michael Forsyth and by opponents of constitutional change in Scotland who said that we should not shelter behind a general election result, given the multiplicity of reasons for the way in which people vote, we said that we would deal with the matter head on and would run the risk of putting it to the people. We are confident of the outcome, but we may be wrong, so let the people decide. We made it clear that that test of opinion would be an advisory note to Parliament when it came to consider the main questions, and we want to hold to that.

I am sorry to tell the House that I came to the conclusion, in conjunction with my colleagues, that if we did not move down this road, the timetable would slip and we would not have the test of public opinion that I think is in everyone's interest and in the interests of direct democracy. On that basis and for that combination of reasons, I do not believe that the motion is unreasonable. It is in the interests of direct democracy and good government.

3.56 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): The first duty of the House is to debate legislation. It is by discharging that duty that we hold Government to account and serve our constituents. A delicate system of checks and balances has grown up in Parliament over centuries. *[Interruption.]* The need for strong government is balanced against the importance of effective opposition; the right of the majority against that of minorities; the call of party discipline against the conscience of individual Members.

Those arrangements rest, to a large extent, on convention, compromise and fair play. Observers from abroad, where government depends on codified

constitutional arrangements, are often astounded by the spirit of fair-mindedness that permeates our parliamentary procedure. *[Interruption.]* In stifling discussion on the Bill—

Madam Speaker: Order. I should be obliged if hon. Members on the Government Bench below the Gangway would pay attention to what is being said.

Mr. Howard: In stifling discussion on the Bill, the Government display their contempt for decency, for convention and for Parliament itself. The guillotine motion is the most drastic way of silencing debate known to Parliament. On allocation of time orders, "Erskine May" says:

"They may be regarded as the extreme limit to which procedure goes in affirming the rights of the majority at the expense of the minorities of the House, and it cannot be denied that they are capable of being used in such a way as to upset the balance, generally so carefully preserved, between the claims of business and the rights of debate."

There can be few clearer examples of the guillotine being abused than the motion now before the House.

The Bill is of major constitutional significance, and the Committee stage has not even begun. To quote "Erskine May" again:

"An allocation of time order is not usually moved . . . until the rate of progress in committee has provided an argument for its necessity."

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that what staggers Labour Members is that hardly any Conservative Front-Bench Members spoke on Second Reading? The Opposition were short of Front-Bench and Back-Bench Members: there was a sea of green on the Conservative Benches. However, when the time came to table amendments, there was an organised filibuster. A vast number of amendments have been tabled, some of which are clearly frivolous. The Conservative party's inability to find Back-Bench Members or Front-Bench spokesmen—I have never experienced a debate on a major Bill for which the Opposition have not put up a Front-Bench spokesman—makes it difficult for us to take the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument seriously.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. Of course we dealt with Second Reading from the Front Bench. I know of no convention in the House that suggests that those who do not take part in a Second Reading debate are in some way barred from taking part in debates in Committee; that has never been the way in which we have proceeded.

The Government Front Bench and, indeed, the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan), claim that the Bill would be delayed, but there is no evidence whatever of such delay. Indeed, by killing discussion before the Committee stage has even started, the Government have not allowed the question whether there would have been a delay to be tested. The Secretary of State for Scotland pointed out that there was one precedent for constitutional Bills to be subject to allocations of time: the guillotine motions on the Scotland and Wales Bills in 1977. We should remember, however, that when the then Leader of the House, Mr. Michael Foot, proposed the guillotine motion for the Scotland Bill, in a manner that could be described only as apologetic in the extreme—a far cry from the manner in which the Secretary of State introduced the motion this afternoon—he used the occasion to remind the House that there had already been 30 days of debate on the legislation. The House should compare that with the arrogant and dismissive way in which the Government have tabled this motion.

Mr. Garnier: In the 1976, 1977 and 1978 Sessions, when the House was dealing with the Wales and Scotland Bills, not only was there plenty of debate beforehand, but the timetable motions allowed for 20, 17 and 11 further days of debate respectively on those Bills.

Mr. Howard: My hon. and learned Friend is right.

We make such points only because that was the precedent relied on by the Secretary of State. It is no use Labour Members saying that there were differences. That is the precedent on which the right hon. Gentleman relies—the only precedent for the guillotining of a Bill of constitutional significance before the Committee stage.

After just a month in office, the Government have already demonstrated their contempt for Parliament. Disregard for the House runs like a thread through their actions. We have seen the cutting of Prime Minister's questions to one session a week, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's failure to announce his changes to the Bank of England in the House. As for the Government's legislative programme, the proposals in the Queen's Speech amount to a massive transfer of powers from the House to bankers, judges, devolved assemblies and Brussels bureaucrats. Never has there been such a comprehensive assault on the sovereignty of the House—and, more important, on the sovereignty of those who send us to this place.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks of the concern of those who send us here. Has he received any representations from his constituents in Folkestone and Hythe about the Bill, and has he consulted Conservatives in Scotland and Wales? Of course, he could not do so in the House, but has he done so anywhere else?

Mr. Howard: Certainly I have consulted Conservatives in both Scotland and Wales about the legislation. As for my constituents in Folkestone and Hythe, they know how much importance I attach to the legislation—as they do—because it featured prominently in my election campaign.

By asking the people of Wales and Scotland to vote before seeing the devolution legislation, the Government are in any case resorting to an anti-parliamentary device. The pre-legislative plebiscite, which is wholly alien to our British traditions, is intended to curtail parliamentary debate and to silence parliamentary criticism. We now learn, however, that we are to be denied a full debate even on the mechanism by which the referendums are to be organised. The Government's distrust of Parliament extends to both the end and the means.

The Prime Minister is not the first politician to speak warmly of constitutional change, while distrusting parliamentary accountability. That path was first trodden by that great reforming socialist Robespierre, who, like the Prime Minister, had a substantial fondness for the guillotine.

[Mr. Howard]

As a result of the guillotine motion, we are to be denied a debate on the amendments relating to the publication and form of the ballot papers, on the procedures for the conduct of the referendums, on the financing and organisation of the referendums, and even on the vital question of the necessary majorities and whether there should be thresholds. Those questions cannot be debated at all under the motion. Apparently, they are regarded by the Secretary of State for Scotland as being in the category of esoteric amendments. That was how he described the amendments for which the motion makes no provision for debate, but they are at the heart of the Bill, which we shall debate in such curtailed form.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Could the shadow Home Secretary point to a Front-Bench Tory amendment on the amendment paper that deals with the issue of thresholds?

Mr. Howard: It has long been the custom and practice of the House for Front-Bench spokesmen to speak on Back-Bench amendments. I am astonished by the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I should have thought that he would be the first to rise to protest against any invasion of the liberties of Back Benchers. It is of great importance that Back-Bench amendments cannot be debated under the motion.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: Not at the moment.

Of all the questions that I have identified, the last is perhaps the most scandalous effect of the motion.

When it was put to me this morning on the "Today" programme, on which I preceded the Secretary of State for Scotland, that the guillotine motion would allow time for debate on questions such as the voting threshold and similar issues, I said that I simply did not know, because the timetable motion had not yet been published. Mr. James Naughtie was incredulous. "Surely," he said, "the motion might limit the time for debate, but it would not deny the possibility of debate altogether." How wrong he was. Fundamental questions at the heart of the Bill, at the heart of what ought to be the debate on the measure, cannot be discussed at all under the terms of the motion.

Much has been made of the importance of establishing

"the settled will of the Scottish people",

to use the late John Smith's famous phrase. Is a bare majority on a low turnout to be described as

"the settled will of the Scottish people"?

On that, the Government are not prepared to allow debate at all.

Mr. Dewar: I should have rather more sympathy for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument if he suggested that the referendum would be binding on Parliament rather than advisory. As he does not seem to be saying that, his argument is greatly undermined.

Mr. Howard: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, our argument is that the referendum should take place after the legislation, that it should take full account of it and be based on a specific question relating to it. The choice that the right hon. Gentleman puts to me is not one that I acknowledge at all. We think that it is fundamentally wrong for the referendum to take place before the legislation.

The question remains: what are the Government frightened of? Why, with a majority of 179, are they determined to suppress any criticism? Could they be worried that, during a debate, the absurdity of expecting people to vote without seeing the legislation would be exposed? Might there have been some concern about the threat that the proposals pose to the long-term unity of our country? I should like to use another quotation:

"The timetable motion is an abuse of power. No one can deny the wish of a Government to secure progress for their business, but that must be balanced against the need for adequate debate and discussion of a measure . . . Guillotines can be justified only where an Opposition have filibustered a Bill, where they have refused all reasonable suggestions to agree a timetable, or where there is no possibility of the Government getting their business through at reasonable speed without a guillotine."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 1988; Vol. 126, c. 757.]

Those are not my words. They are the words of the present Home Secretary.

The Bill touches on the affairs of every person in the United Kingdom. If implemented, it and the devolution legislation to which it is the precursor will bring about a tectonic change in how this island is governed. It contains all the elements necessary for an acrimonious breakdown among the nations of the United Kingdom, yet the Government are determined to choke off discussion. If the referendums were carried, that would be their excuse to still further debate in the House, and any attempt to raise those matters now is to be cut off by the guillotine.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Does my right hon. and learned Friend concede that, in response to a Liberal Democrat intervention, the Secretary of State for Scotland used the Jopling proposals to justify what he has done? Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept from me, a perennial Back Bencher, that the Government of the day always want to get their business through as easily and as quickly as possible, that the House should pay more attention to the genuine interests of Back Benchers and that the Jopling proposals were in fact a weapon of the Government and disadvantageous to Back Benchers' interests?

Mr. Howard: There is much force in the point made by my hon. Friend, and of course it is not simply a question of protecting the role of Back Benchers, important though that is. At the heart of the question that we are debating is the responsibility of Parliament and the fact that we are sent here by our constituents to expose legislation to proper scrutiny. It is that opportunity which we are being denied by the motion.

When they were in opposition, Labour Members spoke of the need for more open government. The British constitution, they complained, concentrated power in the hands of the Executive. Ministers, they said, had been made arrogant by their tenure of office. What then do they suppose the motion constitutes? Its every provision bears witness to a contemptuous, imperious attitude to Parliament, and this is a Government at the beginning of their term, dewy-eyed with reformist fervour.

This shabby measure reflects very badly on the Government and it reflects worst of all on the Leader of the House. She has a special responsibility to the House. It is a responsibility which she has woefully failed to discharge. In the annals of the House, there can be few, if any, holders of her office who have so conspicuously fallen short of what is expected of them so early in their term of office.

We are determined to resist the Government's devolution proposals, not only as the party of the nation, but as the party of the constitution and of Parliament. Our resistance to the Government's plan rests on our conviction that it runs contrary to the genius of this country and breaks every constitutional principle and precedent. By their action today, the Government have confirmed us in that conviction. It is the action of an arrogant Government who hold Parliament in contempt and that is why we shall oppose them with all the energy at our command.

4.12 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): For 18 years, some of us sat on the Bench behind where the former Home Secretary spoke from, so perhaps he will have some inkling of our feelings about the introduction of the guillotine. It is perhaps a bit salutary for some right hon. Gentlemen, who were very happy to see guillotines used on other occasions, to endure, if I may put it that way, some of the medicine that they dished out.

I have no qualms about supporting the Government on this occasion, because in my view the amendment paper of the House of Commons has been cheapened by a flood of frivolous amendments. Some of the amendments are undoubtedly extremely important, but some of them do the reputation of Parliament no good whatever. This matter is far too important to be the subject of frivolous, wrecking amendments. What concerns us is the need to have serious discussion.

Short speeches have been requested, but I must make one point. I hope that attention will be given to what we might call the Gary McAllister problem—the problem of the Scottish football captain—who is earning his living in England and cannot take part in a referendum. Like thousands of others working in England, however, he has a moral right at least to be considered. I say that not in a wrecking sense but because I think that there is a proposal for consideration. Consideration should be given to allowing those Scots in England who apply, bona fide, to take part in the referendum to do so.

Another problem is what might be called the Paul Lambert question. A number of Scots are working in the European Community, often for the Government or for the great firms of this country. It is indisputable that they feel that they should take part in a referendum, regardless of how they may vote. I want Ministers to give serious consideration to what can be called the Gary McAllister or Paul Lambert problem because there are thousands of people in their position.

4.15 pm

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): On several occasions during her response to questions last night the Leader of the House referred to the small number of Members present on Second Reading—the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) made a similar point—as if that justified her action. That is a novel doctrine and it does not stand up, particularly as the guillotine is being introduced before the Committee stage has even started.

During my time as a Minister, I introduced a range of Bills and on some occasions the Opposition Benches were not full. I did not think that the Opposition's view was that in those circumstances a guillotine could be introduced automatically after Second Reading.

There is great irony in the Leader of the House referring to the Second Reading debate because, immediately following it, the Government had arranged a debate on the modernisation of procedures in the House of Commons. The right hon. Lady said:

> "I hope that by holding this debate so early in the Parliament, we have proved our serious intent in terms of facilitating improvements in the workings of Parliament."—[*Official Report*, 22 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 901.]

There is no point talking about the Government's serious intent to modernise Parliament to enable more scrutiny of legislation and to set up pre-legislation Committees, only for her to show their true intent by guillotining a constitutional Bill before its Committee stage begins. The only precedent that is claimed for this occurred under the previous Labour Government.

Conservative Members know that if my right hon. Friend the former Member for Braintree had been Leader of the House at this time, there is no way that he would have given way to the pressure that is being put on the Leader of the House by Ministers.

The Leader of the House is not even proposing the motion on the guillotine; I cannot remember a time when the Leader of the House did not propose such a motion. As the Secretary of State for Scotland said, this has been decided not by her, but by the Ministers responsible for the legislation.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale) *rose—*

Sir Norman Fowler: I will not give way.

The Leader of the House is wrong for several reasons. First, there is no doubt that this is a constitutional Bill—one has only to read the explanatory memorandum to understand that. It is absurd for the right hon. Lady to argue, as she did last night, that it is a Bill of no great consequence. She described it as a simple, straightforward Bill of only six clauses. Surely we all accept that it is substantially more important than that. The Liberal Democrats' going along with her argument is a sign of what we had already guessed—that they will be as ineffective in opposition in this Parliament as they were in the last.

The second reason why the guillotine is wrong is that what the Leader of the House calls a simple, straightforward Bill contains important issues of principle—for example, who is enfranchised and what information is issued at the time of the referendum. It might be inconvenient for the Government, it might even take a few hours of debate, but surely no one can argue that the Bill is not important.

Thirdly, the right hon. Lady should stand up against her colleagues because it is clear that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) said, Ministers sitting at the Cabinet table have only one interest—getting their legislation through. They do not give a fig about

[Sir Norman Fowler]

the rights of Parliament, and, quite frankly, Government Departments care and understand even less. That is why to have a strong Leader of the House, able and willing to stand up for the rights of Parliament, is so important.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said, what is of great concern—this is a Commons matter—is that, step by step, power is being taken away from this House. There was no consultation on the change to Prime Minister's Questions. It was pushed through for one reason alone—not for the benefit of the House, but to make the Prime Minister's life easier and to save him facing the scrutiny that he would otherwise have faced twice a week. Policy announcements have been made outside the Chamber—

Mr. Wallace: The right hon. Gentleman would never have done that when he was in government, would he?

Sir Norman Fowler: No, I would not. I challenge the hon. Gentleman to find an instance of my doing so.

Mr. Wallace: The right hon. Gentleman knows that on many occasions his ministerial colleagues—

Sir Norman Fowler: The hon. Gentleman challenged me.

Mr. Wallace: Did the right hon. Gentleman, as chairman of his party or as a member of the Cabinet, ever acquiesce in his colleagues doing so?

Sir Norman Fowler: I asked the hon. Gentleman a straight question, to which he has given me a typical Liberal answer.

The guillotine motion is a further step in the Government's attempt to make the House of Commons a rubber stamp. That should offend not only Conservative Members, but anyone who regards the Chamber as important. One of the most revealing features of last night's statement was the reaction of Ministers. I speak not of the Leader of the House, but of her colleagues, who gave a sniggering response to questions. There was palpable self-satisfaction in a group who clearly felt, "We are the masters now." Well, they are the masters now and they will get their guillotine; there is no question about that. However, their triumphalism and arrogance are already sowing the seeds of their destruction.

4.23 pm

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy): I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to make my maiden speech so early in this Parliament, especially in a debate on a matter very close to my heart and the hearts of many of my colleagues.

I am privileged and truly honoured to be the first woman to represent the most beautiful constituency of Conwy in north Wales. For almost 27 years, it was represented by Sir Wyn Roberts, who retired at the general election. I am aware that he is held in very high regard by hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I should very much like to be associated with that view.

To describe my constituency requires superlatives that I may not have mastered in the English language. I would feel more at home in my native tongue of Welsh, memorably described as "iaith y nefoedd" by Gruffydd Robert Milan over 400 years ago in 1567, I believe. For those not versed in the Welsh tongue, "iaith y nefoedd" means "the language of heaven".

The Conwy constituency includes not only the beautiful town of that name but several other major centres. Tourism is a major industry. Exemplified by that queen of resorts, Llandudno, tourism encompasses the whole of the constituency, providing natural attractions of mountain and sea as well as historic buildings.

Industry and commerce are less well represented in my constituency than I would wish, and it will be my hope that this Parliament will be able to provide encouragement to their development. Indeed, I welcome the comments made last week by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales when he said that he wants a new focus for the Welsh Development Agency and to see more jobs created in the valleys and in western and north-western Wales. Such development is vital if we are to reduce the scourge of unemployment. In my constituency, youth unemployment is unacceptably high, and our young people will most certainly find encouragement in the Gracious Speech.

The old slate quarrying town of Bethesda has a special place in the hearts of trade unionists and of members of my party. It is not quite 100 years since the workers of Penrhyn quarry stood up to the might of their employer for three long years. Bloodied but unbowed by that struggle, they would welcome the Gracious Speech, as do their descendants today, for what it offers for a fairer society.

The majority of those quarry men and their families were members of Welsh chapels. Our chapels and eisteddfodau were crucial in the religious, political and cultural development of the Welsh nation. It was by pennies collected through the chapels and from house to house that Bangor gained its "Coleg ar y Bryn"—"the college on the hill". Now it is a constituent college of the university of Wales and enjoys worldwide fame for its academic excellence. I should perhaps declare an interest in my affection for Bangor. I was born there, and it is where—two years ago, as a mature student—I obtained my degree.

The tradition of local collection continues to the present day. So when the need was identified for a new cancer treatment unit at the Ysbyty Gwynedd hospital in Bangor, it was local people who dug deep into their pockets to finance the building of it. I hasten to add that contributions were made not only by the people of my constituency but by those of surrounding constituencies, represented by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The magnificent sum of £1.25 million was collected through the dedicated efforts of many volunteers, spearheaded by Dr. Jim Davies. I applaud their efforts, and am confident it will not be long before building begins.

The academic standards of our university, excellent as they are, will be greatly improved by raising standards in primary and secondary education. A reduction in primary school class sizes and the improvement in training for head teachers are important steps in that direction. It will,

I believe, be a great encouragement to all those in education, from primary through to university level, to know that the Government's No.1 priority is education.

In such a diverse constituency, it has been particularly gratifying to me to appreciate how much the Gracious Speech reflects the wishes of so many for devolution. It is significant to note that, on the occasion of my predecessor's maiden speech, in 1970, he looked forward to

"a general devolution of power from central Government",

and said that the people of Wales would then feel that they would

"have a greater voice in the conduct of their affairs."—[*Official Report*, 9 July 1970; Vol. 803, c. 893.]

I hope that I am not being too controversial for this occasion to express the view that since 1970, over a period of 27 years, his wishes have not been achieved. During the past few weeks, however, Sir Wyn Roberts, having retired from this House, has once again expressed his support for devolution. I welcome his comments.

Of course, the Labour Government of 1974-79 offered devolution to the people of Wales. I supported those proposals and campaigned for them. I am delighted that, as a Member of Parliament, I shall have a further opportunity—a real opportunity—to campaign for devolution. I am particularly pleased that the Government have moved so quickly to fulfil the election commitment to establish a Welsh Assembly. It is the best possible demonstration of our will to ensure that the people of Wales are democratically governed with proper accountability. As that is perhaps a new concept for many people, it will be for those of us in this House who respect and believe in the democratic system to campaign with vigour to ensure that the people of Wales understand the opportunity and, more important, that they grasp it.

I am sure that many hon. Members have, like me, spent many years in local politics at community, district and county levels, dealing at first hand with local problems and issues. So often, those problems were my problems and we worked with the local authorities to solve them. It was called partnership. Government should be as close to the people as possible; it should be a partnership. This will be an historic decision, and it is vital that local people take up the opportunity to establish a Welsh Assembly. It will bring decisions closer to the people in Wales and end rule by unaccountable quangos. Power will be decentralised as much as possible, which can only be good for jobs, good for health and social services, good for education, good for other public services and good for the people of Conwy and the people of Wales.

We are on the threshold of history. That is why, in the coming months, I shall campaign hard for a large yes vote in the devolution referendum. Diolch yn fawr iawn—thank you very much.

4.31 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): It is my pleasure and privilege to congratulate the hon. Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams) on a very eloquent maiden speech. I am sure that all hon. Members who listened to her gained not only an insight into an attractive and diverse constituency but a feel for the spirit of the constituency and its people. I congratulate the hon. Lady and look forward to hearing the many contributions that she will no doubt make to debates on devolution.

It was also refreshing to be reminded of the commitment of Sir Wyn Roberts to the decentralisation of power in 1970. The House will recognise and acknowledge the hon. Lady's tribute to him. It is refreshing that the issues on which Sir Wyn, and probably many other Conservatives, campaigned in 1970 will be brought to fruition.

I shall try to be brief because the less time spent debating the timetable motion, the more time there will be to deal with the first batch of amendments, and perhaps even to have more than one vote, although that is probably a triumph of hope over experience.

I do not accept that we are debating what the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) described as a first-class constitutional Bill. As the Secretary of State for Scotland reminded us, we are debating an advisory referendum; there is nothing in it that will affect in any way the sovereignty of Parliament—if, indeed, we accept that Westminster is sovereign. That is a point of difference between us and the Labour party. Those of us who signed the Claim of Right in Scotland do not necessarily accept that principle.

It is also right for the Secretary of State to point to the precedents. My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) has reminded me of the guillotining of two Bills in one debate in December 1993—the Statutory Sick Pay Bill and the Social Security (Contributions) Bill. That move provoked such antagonism that the official Opposition broke off pairing arrangements. On that occasion, there was a guillotine before the Second Reading of both Bills and a special motion to allow Committee amendments to be tabled before Second Reading. Although we think that the referendum for Scotland is unnecessary, at least it will give a say to the people. Those Bills gave Ministers considerable power to introduce secondary legislation that would have a pecuniary impact on many businesses, particularly small ones.

As my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said earlier, the timetabling of proceedings on Bills was recommended by Jopling. I think that it is better to timetable before the start of Committee proceedings than to do so part way through, after drawn-out debates on a limited number of clauses and amendments, which often results in the clauses and amendments in the second half—or not even the second half, but the remaining two thirds or five sixths—of the Bill being given very cursory consideration. Parliament has often not done its job properly because it has not had adequate opportunity to scrutinise the latter stages of a Bill.

My party's publication, "A Parliament for the People—Proposals to Reform the House of Commons", suggested an all-party legislative steering committee to consider the programming of Bills to ensure that all parts are properly scrutinised. I hope that the Leader of the House will consider the proper timetabling of Bills during her inquiry into the reform of the procedures of the House. We can do much more on that.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Does my hon. Friend recognise that that argument is not peculiar to the Liberal Democrats? It was

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

advanced by the legislative committee of the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government, chaired by the distinguished Conservative Lord Rippon of Hexham.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that information. The Jopling recommendations commanded broad support on both sides of the House. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) earlier repeated the frequently made argument that guillotines are the enemy of Back Benchers. I am not sure that that is right. There will be an opportunity for proper debate of the amendments tabled by those of us who are not in the official Opposition and those tabled by the official Opposition. That would not necessarily have been the case otherwise.

Mr. Luff: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a significant number of important amendments tabled by the minority parties cannot be debated under the terms of the motion, including an important amendment on tax-raising powers for the Welsh Assembly?

Mr. Wallace: The point that I had just finished making was that the timetable allows for debate of the minority parties' arguments. We have tabled amendments to consolidate the two questions in Scotland into one. The Government do not agree, but we have a legitimate argument and there will be time for that debate. The Scottish National party wants a third question in a multi-option referendum. I do not agree with that, but I accept that it is a legitimate issue for the House to debate and is relevant to the referendum. There will be time to debate that.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) asked the shadow Home Secretary why the official Opposition had not got round to tabling amendments about the threshold. For once, the hon. Gentleman was not accurate. New clauses 22 to 25 provide for a threshold by requiring a 65 per cent. turnout. However, those new clauses are all starred. The Conservatives did not get round to tabling them until yesterday, suggesting that the leadership collective could not make up their minds on the issue.

The timetable motion was tabled because of the host of frivolous amendments on the amendment paper. I use the word "frivolous" advisedly. I have just appeared on "Westminster Live" with the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who admitted that some of the amendments were frivolous.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Wallace: The right hon. Gentleman shakes his head. He did, however, mention the frivolous amendments to which I have referred. I will describe some of them.

Mr. Hague: I actually said that if any amendments were frivolous, they would not have been selected for debate by the Chair.

Mr. Wallace: If the right hon. Gentleman gets a transcript of the programme, he will find that he did describe some of the amendments as frivolous. One example is amendment No. 240, in the name of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), which says of Scotland:

"No referendum shall be held on any day other than St. Andrew's Day."

This year, St. Andrew's day is on a Sunday, but that does not matter because we also have amendment No. 184, which says:

"No referendum shall be held on any day other than a Sunday."

Mr. Luff: That amendment has not been selected.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman says that the amendment was not selected. My point is that those amendments are an insight into the mindset of those who tabled them. The amendments are on the amendment paper and the hon. Members concerned cannot run away from the kind of amendments—

Sir Patrick Cormack: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You, like me, have been a Committee Chairman for many long years. You know very well that no Chairman can dictate what is or is not tabled. You equally know that no Chairman would select a frivolous amendment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Selection is done, I hope, on an objective basis that stands the test of time.

Mr. Wallace: I think that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, show much more good sense in the selection of the amendments than do those who tabled them.

My point concerns the kind of amendments that were tabled. Amendment No. 186 says:

"No referendum shall be held for a period of less than two days."

That amendment was tabled by the same person, the hon. Member for North Essex, who said that the referendum should not be held on any day other than a Sunday. We would need to have a month of Sundays, or perhaps the suggestion is that the referendum should be held on two consecutive Sundays, like the French elections.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Does the hon. Gentleman anticipate that the Tory Members who tabled the frivolous amendments will take an active part in the referendum campaign in Scotland or in Wales, or will they leave the active campaigning to their hon. Friends in Scotland and in Wales?

Mr. Wallace: There is a difficulty in that those Tory Members do not have any hon. Friends in Scotland or in Wales. As the—

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: We have many voters.

Mr. Wallace: The words used were "hon. Friends". The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said that the Conservatives were the party of the nation. One nation Conservatism is now England, and only part of that. No longer does the Conservative party speak for the nation in Parliament, which is an important point to remember.

Last night, I referred to amendment No. 189, which says:

"Voting in the referendum shall only take place during daylight hours."

That is a travesty. What about the men and women of the night who would not be allowed an opportunity to vote if such an amendment were accepted?

The timetable motion allows for debate on some important issues. It would be better to go on from here and to have proper programming of legislation. I hope that we shall achieve that in this Parliament. That is the way to achieve the proper scrutiny of Bills rather than leaving it to chance—

Mr. Dalyell: On the question of proper scrutiny, are the hon. Gentleman and his collective colleagues, if I may use those words, in favour of proper scrutiny of the crucial devolution White Paper?

Mr. Wallace: I have no doubt that there will be a debate on the White Paper. More importantly, we would certainly expect proper scrutiny of legislation flowing from that White Paper. I do not see how, except in a one-day debate, we could have scrutiny of a White Paper. The House would, however, expect proper scrutiny of any legislation that followed. I believe that the House will get proper scrutiny.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wallace: I had concluded my remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) has concluded his remarks.

4.43 pm

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams). All Conservative Members will have appreciated her kind remarks about our old friend and colleague, Sir Wyn Roberts. The only advice he would have added to what she said was that if she addresses the House in a prolonged way in the native language of which both he and she are rightly proud, she may not always be addressing a Chamber quite as well filled as this. I congratulate her, however, on a speech that was well delivered with a nice light note and we look forward to much more from her.

I have been out of the House for five years—what is delicately known as broken service. I hope, therefore, that I may be indulged if I make one or two remarks about my predecessor, Sir Peter Hordern, who represented Horsham with great dedication for more than 32 years. He did great service to his constituency where he is still very much loved and I know that he attracted a lot of affection and admiration in the House.

Sir Peter never sought high office; he believed that representing his constituents in the United Kingdom Parliament was high enough privilege in itself, as I do. He believed that it was the function of this House to scrutinise legislation and to act as a proper check on what the Government did. He always did that, whether he sat on the Government Benches or on the Opposition Benches. That is what is important in this debate.

When I first came into the House 14 years ago, I, too, was part of a landslide. I came in when the Conservative party had a majority of 144, yet we did not believe then that we owned the House of Commons because we had had a big election victory. We believed that the House of Commons had its rights and that those rights had been fought for for centuries and were to be preserved, even at the Government's inconvenience.

The Government have become a little confused on some specific points. There seems to be some confusion about whether they consider the Bill to be a constitutional Bill. The Prime Minister does—or did. In his speech during the debate on the Gracious Speech on 14 May, when my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) asked him to give an undertaking that

"any constitutional measures"—

my hon. Friend was not referring specifically to this Bill—

"will be taken in Committee on the Floor of the House".

the Prime Minister replied:

"As I have said before to the hon. Gentleman, the referendum Bill will of course be taken on the Floor of the House."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 67.]

The Prime Minister clearly thought that the Bill was a constitutional measure.

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office also thought that the Bill was a constitutional Bill. When he wound up the debate on Second Reading, he specifically referred to it as being a constitutional measure. He said:

"The Government want to ensure that debates are properly scrutinised and have the maximum participation"—

words that must be sticking in his craw at the moment—

"of every part of the House."

The hon. Gentleman was not talking about general constitutional measures; he was talking about this Bill. He said:

"That should be the case when we are dealing with serious constitutional issues."—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 804.]

We need to know whether the Government believe this to be a constitutional Bill. If it is a constitutional Bill, how can it be right, before we have even embarked on the Committee stage, for the Government to act in this way to gag debate? If it is not a constitutional Bill, but it is, as the Leader of the House said last night and as the Secretary of State for Scotland said today, merely a technical or paving Bill, why is it being taken on the Floor of the House at all? The House is entitled to have answers to those questions.

Whatever the answer, the House is being denied the opportunity for proper scrutiny. It is being denied the opportunity for detailed consideration of amendments and clauses, sometimes at inconvenient length, in Standing Committee because the Bill is being considered here, where there is more pressure on time. Having discussed the Bill here on the basis of its being a constitutional Bill—or not, we do not know because no light has been shed on the matter—the opportunity for maximum debate in all parts of the House, as the Minister of State promised, has been removed.

[Mr. Francis Maude]

It would be helpful if the Minister who is to wind up the debate could shed some light on another matter. Will the full, substantive devolution Bill be published before the referendums take place? Again, we have had conflicting messages on that. On 14 May, the Prime Minister was challenged on the subject by the leader of the Scottish National party. The Prime Minister said:

"Of course the Bill will be published in time for the referendum, because the referendum will take place on those proposals."

That is the last we have heard of that suggestion. Since then, all the talk has been merely that the White Paper will be published before the referendum. The question is not just dancing on the head of a pin, because the sequence matters.

The sequence that is now proposed is the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill; followed by a White Paper; followed by the referendum; followed by the devolution Bill if the referendum is favourable; followed by implementation. We all know—the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has made it clear, and the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) has also made the point—that there can be great differences between the aims and aspirations of policy set out in a White Paper and how they are translated into practice and into hard statutory fact when a Bill comes before Parliament. That fact makes a difference to the Bill we are considering today, because of the effect of the referendums. A referendum that has been held on a published Bill, albeit not yet enacted by Parliament, will have a different effect from one that has been held on a mere set of policies set out in a White Paper.

Mr. Dalyell: May I clarify the right hon. Gentleman's reference to me? Whatever happens, it is my personal view, for what it is worth, that a final referendum should be held on the one meaningful question that can be asked, which is "Do you approve of the Scotland Act 1997—or 1998—as passed by Parliament?" That would mean another referendum.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman puts it very well and I do not want to add to or subtract from that point. A final referendum is desirable. It is what he has argued for and the way that it was done last time. It may be that that unhappy experience is carved deep on the minds of Ministers and led them to come up with this procedure. The dynamic of the procedure matters a great deal.

Mr. Dewar: I do not wish the right hon. Gentleman to labour mightily under a misapprehension. It is clear from the passage that he quoted, if one reads the whole passage, that it was a reference to the White Paper, and everybody understood that. To avoid all doubt, we propose that the White Paper should be published before the House rises—

Mr. Fallon: And debated?

Mr. Dewar: Yes.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Not guillotined.

Mr. Dewar: Someone is showing his grasp of parliamentary procedure. I wish to make it clear that a White Paper will be published before the House rises. It will set out the scheme in some detail and the referendum will be held on the basis of the proposals in the White Paper. We will go on from there, as the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) would expect.

Mr. Maude: The right hon. Gentleman says that I am under a misapprehension, but if so it is a widespread one. What the Prime Minister said was very clear. He was asked in terms by the leader of the Scottish National party:

"Can he tell the House exactly when he expects to publish the Scottish devolution Bill?"

The answer was:

"Of course the Bill"—

not the White Paper—

"will be published in time for the referendum".

That was not just a casual remark, because the Prime Minister went on to say:

"because the referendum will take place on those proposals."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 64.]

He did not say it will take place on the White Paper. That matters because all the unanswered questions that lie in the morass that the Government are in must be resolved. They cannot be resolved only in the White Paper: they must be resolved in hard statutory fact by a Bill.

Mr. Salmond: I can confirm to the right hon. Gentleman that that was what I asked the Prime Minister and that that was his answer, and it is in *Hansard*. I also remind him that the Prime Minister has not always recently shown himself to be fully in command of this subject.

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman may think that: I could not possibly comment. The Prime Minister must answer for himself. If he got it wrong, he should come to the House and say so. The Secretary of State for Scotland says that that is a pompous suggestion, but the Prime Minister made that apparently considered remark to the House of Commons. I happen to think that the House of Commons matters and that the Prime Minister should consider what he says to us to be important.

Mr. Dewar: The right hon. Gentleman may criticise and make his point, but I do not want him to be under a misapprehension. If he has been following the debate with care, including speeches made on several occasions and other statements by the Government, he will understand that the situation is straightforward and well understood, certainly by most of my hon. Friends. He is in danger of making myths.

Mr. Maude: I do not think so. I cannot say whether the Prime Minister was not in command of his brief or whether the policy has been changed and made on the hoof, as has happened so often in this tawdry saga. If the Prime Minister made an honest mistake, as the Secretary of State suggests, let him come here and tell us. The House of Commons deserves no less.

The point matters because of the dynamic of the sequence of events. The Government propose to publish some proposals in a White Paper that may—or may not, we do not know—deal with the great unanswered questions that the hon. Member for Linlithgow and others

have raised, including the West Lothian question, and others about scrutiny of the spending of money raised by this House but disbursed by the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament. How will that money be controlled and what will happen to the funding formula? Those are substantial and important matters, and they must be resolved. Will they be dealt with satisfactorily in the White Paper? I do not think so.

Those matters must be set forth in a draft Bill so that the people of Scotland and Wales can make a mature and considered judgment about whether they like the look of the creature that is offered to them. If they do not, as I suspect they may not, that should be tested fully. Otherwise, to use the phrase of the hon. Member for Linlithgow, the people will be offered a pig in a poke. It may be accepted because the details will be unclear, but the questions will remain unanswered.

If the proposals are accepted, the Government will claim that they have a mandate. They will claim that they have not only the endorsement of their fabled manifesto in the general election, but the endorsement given by the referendum. They will say that they do not need to bother with any more tiresome business in the House of Commons and they will just bang the proposals through. If the Secretary of State for Scotland thinks that that is scaremongering, he should remember what the Prime Minister said on the issue, in his first debate as Prime Minister, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire:

"There will be ample time for debate"—

on the substantive devolution Bill—

"but I have to say to the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members that if the firmly established will of the Scottish and Welsh people is demonstrated in the referendums, the people will not expect us to be game-playing here—they will expect us to legislate."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 67.]

That is a chilling indication of what is to come. The Government will bang through this wretched Bill without proper debate, seek a popular mandate in the referendums, then come back here and say, "Tough luck House of Commons, we have got our mandate. You can go hang." That will not do.

I said at the outset that I first entered the House as part of a landslide victory. I remember the feeling that that induced. We had a majority—not quite on the grandiose scale of the Government's, but not far off—but we did not believe that a big election victory translated into the Government owning the House of Commons. Indeed, rather than blasting through measures that reduced the House of Commons' power, one of the first things we did after winning in 1979, was to enhance it and make life more difficult for the Executive. We introduced Select Committees, which have been an adornment to the House—not always convenient to those of us who have been Ministers, and often a nuisance—and have enhanced its ability to hold Ministers to account.

The Government are only a month old, yet a pattern is developing—a pattern of thinking that they can take the House of Commons for granted, feeling that, because they have most of the seats in the House, they own it. Well, they do not. This House has been here for much longer than this Parliament or this Government and it will be here for a long time afterwards. Its powers may be reduced as a result of this legislation and what the Prime Minister decides to hand over in Amsterdam in a few weeks' time, but it will continue to take seriously its historic task of holding the Government to account.

I hope that the Government will at least do the House the courtesy of answering some of the questions that have been asked. Will the devolution Bill—if we get to that stage—be debated on the Floor of the House in Committee? Unquestionably, it is a major constitutional measure, yet all we have heard so far has been waffle and prevarication: "Well, it will all have to be looked at; it is all very difficult. Who can tell?" If it comes about, it will be one of the most important constitutional measures this century. If it is not to be taken step by step, clause by painful clause and amendment by amendment on the Floor of the House, it is difficult to envisage what should be.

The second question to which we need an answer today is: when it is debated on the Floor of the House—I do not believe that even this Government, with their breathtaking arrogance, will refuse to allow that—will a guarantee be given that no more timetable motions will be tabled and that, unlike today, proper time to debate will be provided? If, at the end of this debate, Ministers fail to answer those questions, they will have damaged their reputation even more.

5.2 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the shadow Home Secretary, at the outset of the debate is worth repeating. He quoted from "Erskine May". Describing guillotine motions, it says:

"They may be regarded as the extreme limit to which procedure goes in affirming the rights of the majority at the expense of the minorities of the House, and it cannot be denied that they are capable of being used in such a way as to upset the balance, generally so carefully preserved, between the claims of business and the rights of debate."

The guillotine is not lightly used and not applied without reason. The usual reason is to counter delaying tactics, actual or threatened, amounting in the Government's view to obstruction.

If I have to take responsibility at all as an Opposition Back Bencher, I must accept the general rebuke of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—it is not worth pretending otherwise. Some silly amendments have been tabled in the sense that they would not lead to much light being thrown on the Bill.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ron Davies): Which particular ones?

Mr. Garnier: I do not want to confuse the right hon. Gentleman; he is not a man of great thought. Nor do I want to delay the debate.

As the Secretary of State for Scotland admitted, on occasion, Opposition Back Benchers table amendments which they know are unlikely to draw favour from the Chairman of Ways and Means. The important point, however, is that, among the amendments tabled, plenty of subjects that deserve sensible debate are raised. As a consequence of the timetable motion, a raft of those important issues will not be debated. They include the publication and form of the Government's proposals, procedures for the conduct of the referendums, the name and tax-raising powers of any Welsh Assembly, the financing and organisation of the referendum campaign

[Mr. Garnier]

and, perhaps most important, the required majorities—the threshold question. None of those is to be debated. Whether the Government like it or not, those issues are entitled to be debated, yet by virtue of the timetable motion, they are unable to be debated, let alone voted on.

The Secretary of State for Scotland, in partly pooh-poohing the subject of precedent—which was interesting for a lawyer—attempted to draw comfort from the proceedings on the Wales Bill and the Scotland Bill in 1977. He said that, under a Labour Government—some precedent that—guillotine motions were moved before the Bills went into Committee. What he failed to say was that the timetable motions permitted, under the Scotland Bill, 17 further days of debate, and, under the Wales Bill, 11 further days of debate—not the two very limited days with which we are presented today.

As an Opposition Member of a party that has been badly defeated, I must accept that the arithmetic of the House means that the timetable motion and the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill will go ramming through and that we will have what I gather is now called an advisory referendum in due course, whatever that may be. That is a fact of life with which I must come to terms. Nonetheless, the Government are seeking to stifle arguments that ought to be deployed and arguments that my constituents want to be deployed.

The attitude to opposition and argument is informed by comments made by those who now sit on the Treasury Bench. It is instructive to read an article that appeared in *The Western Mail* on 23 April—during the election campaign. The new Secretary of State for Wales was asked about the devolution Bill. After making some rude remarks about the then Lord Chancellor, my right hon. and noble Friend Lord MacKay, pooh-poohing his ability and right to hold views on matters of political interest, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"The Labour party will have a very clear mandate, and it's offensive to any democrat to countenance the unelected House of Lords interfering in the democratic process."

It just so happens that, under our constitution, the House of Lords is very much part of our democratic process and constitutional arrangements. How one gets there is another matter and, perhaps, for debate another day. Huge chunks of debates that we may or may not be having over the next few days will lead to the Bill going to another place without many of the issues being considered.

The Secretary of State for Wales went on to say in *The Western Mail* article:

"The process by which the devolution legislation that will be passed through the House of Commons will be a matter for the House of Commons . . . The next House of Commons will decide its own procedure. The Labour Party has included in its manifesto very precise details of our intention of a referendum. If we have a Labour Party elected on its manifesto, it will have a very clear and precise mandate and, in compliance with the Salisbury convention, the next Labour government will brook no interference from people who speak for no one but themselves and their own vested interests."

The House should notice the language. It is the language of the Lord Protector, the control freak. *[Interruption.]* Notice how Labour Members smirk and snigger when they are brought to understand. Not everybody agrees with them. Of course the Government have a majority. Let them smile and smirk at it. On behalf of our constituents, we as Opposition Back Benchers are entitled to expect to be listened to with some respect in the House.

Ministers may disagree with us and think that we are out of date and wrong and have nothing to say. They may sit there smirking, as the Secretary of State for Wales is doing; last night, all around him, sat his little friends, the Stepford wives, who have been told not to say anything for fear that they might offend him or the Chief Whip or the Minister without Portfolio—let alone the Excalibur information system that we now have to contend with. Ministers sit there smirking, saying, "We are the masters now." Has not the language become totally Orwellian? Servants now equals masters.

Who else can we turn to for instruction about the way in which the Government now operate? The Secretary of State for Scotland, as Opposition Chief Whip, was on the BBC programme, "Analysis", on 24 April.

Mr. Ron Davies: It says here.

Mr. Garnier: It does indeed, and it is worth repeating. I know that the right hon. Gentleman does not like it, but I intend to say it several times so that people outside know what sort of Government we have to cope with.

The then Opposition Chief Whip said that we would have "adequate scrutiny and debate". If he thinks that this timetable motion leads to adequate scrutiny and debate, when in fact it denies the opportunity to debate a series of most important issues, he has a most interesting idea about the English language. He went on:

"We want to talk with other parties about the best way of achieving this".

Did Ministers talk through the usual channels to the Opposition? I do not know about the other parties, but I doubt whether they bothered to listen to the official Opposition.

When pressed on the point, the right hon. Gentleman continued:

"if you look at, for example, enormously important constitutional bills recently, the biggest single transfer of sovereignty to the European Union was the Single European Act. That was put through by this Conservative government, and they did it with a timetable motion in double quick time."

Let us examine the facts. There had been three days' debate on one clause of the Single European Act in a Committee of the whole House before the guillotine was introduced. That guillotine debate was not confined to the usual three hours but was given additional time. A good deal more time was allowed following the guillotine motion for debate on that issue.

The Secretary of State said:

"I don't want to abuse the House. I certainly don't want to abuse people's right to scrutiny and debate and we will make very sure that this is done adequately and this is done properly."

Is that what he has done on this occasion? Is that what this timetable motion allows for? I do not think so.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garnier: I shall finish this quotation and then I shall certainly give way. The Secretary of State said:

"If we have a bill that has been endorsed at a General Election and in this case, the double lock of being very very specifically endorsed in a referendum in both Scotland and Wales, then clearly

it would be very silly for a government to say that a minority which is honourably but in our view mistakenly opposed to it, should be allowed to hold it up interminably."

Nobody is suggesting that the Opposition intend to hold up the Bill interminably, but there are some important issues that are being denied debate and a vote. That is why it is not far-fetched to suggest that the language used by the then Opposition, the new Government, is the language of Orwell and the Star Chamber.

Mr. Maclennan: The moment has almost passed, but I wanted to ask the hon. and learned Gentleman whether he really thought that an advisory referendum such as we are considering in this debate has any resemblance whatever to the transfer of powers under the Single European Act which the Conservative Government countenanced and indeed forced through with a rather tight guillotine.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman sadly misses my point, which is that the way in which the then Opposition Chief Whip and the then shadow Secretary of State for Wales were speaking informed the way in which they have approached this timetable motion. They do not seem to care about what Opposition parties have to say. They do not want a debate; they find it inconvenient. They have 200 Back Benchers who are getting fidgety, and whose time they would prefer to be spent elsewhere, rather than getting cross with their Whips.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) made a powerful speech and spoke most kindly about his predecessor, who served the House extremely well for many years. During that speech, he quoted my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) and the Prime Minister's reply. The second part of that reply is yet further evidence that the Government have no idea about the rights of Parliament and the need to debate fully. They sit there smirking and turning round to their hon. Friends, nudging and winking and saying, "We are the servants—which really means the masters—now."

The Prime Minister said:

"There will be ample time for debate, but I have to say to the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members that if the firmly established will of the Scottish and Welsh people is demonstrated in referendums, the people will not expect us to be game-playing here—they will expect us to legislate."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 67.]

Quite frankly, he is saying, "Stuff Parliament; what we say goes, and we will ram it home." It is a case not only of game-playing but of the Prime Minister and the Government taking the whole deck of cards off the table and sweeping the stake money away with it.

I do not believe that the House has ever seen a more disreputable motion. Regardless of whether one agrees with the Bill, after today's and last night's performances, the Government should be ashamed of themselves.

5.15 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I listened with great care and interest to the Secretary of State for Scotland. Before any comments are made, à la Leader of the House last night, let me say that I sat through one and a half days trying and failing to get into the debate on Second Reading, so I feel it fully legitimate that I should speak on the motion.

Normally, one enjoys crossing swords with the Secretary of State for Scotland, as Conservative Members in particular have great respect for his skills and intellect and, not least, for his sincerity. Knowing that he was previously Opposition Chief Whip, I do not want to ruin any prospects of promotion, so I shall say that his sincerity is a deep-rooted veneer. I suspect that that will help him more than anything else.

Last week, the Secretary of State said that the measure was "of great importance". The fact that it is being debated on the Floor of the House shows that it is a constitutional measure. We can debate all day about whether it is a constitutional measure of the first importance; but the fact remains that it is a constitutional measure.

I urge the Government to think carefully about that, because the reason for so many amendments being tabled is the obscurity of what will follow. What follows is an open book: we have no idea what the detail of the devolution legislation will entail.

What we are being asked to enact is not a simple advisory measure, as we are told. The Secretary of State for Scotland made great play of the advisory point, saying that we would merely be asking the people for their opinion. What we are in fact asking the people in Scotland and Wales for is a blank cheque; we are asking them to say that the Government may do anything that they wish and that they have their approval.

Such a device has been used many times. It is alien to this country, but in other places, where people want absolute authority, it is used as a rubber stamp for what they may do subsequently. It is alien to the House and the country simply because we have always relied on the scrutiny of Parliament to get into the details.

I make no bones about this, because, although I have heard many comments from my hon. Friends about what should or should not happen on guillotines, I sat on the Government Benches throughout the Maastricht debates, believing quite legitimately that that legislation was wrong, and went through the line-by-line detail many times; I attended all the debates, which is something that many Labour Members did not do.

One or two of the minority parties may recall that, when we got into the detail of the Maastricht treaty, we found how deeply flawed the legislation before us was. Had we guillotined that legislation—as, sadly, I accept was done with the Single European Act—and forced it through the House, many of the things that we warned about would not have been spotted and could not have been rectified. Indeed, many cannot be rectified. None the less, they were spotted. I warned about the social chapter opt-out and was told, "You don't know what you are talking about. We will deal with it. It works." It did not work. The 48-hour working week was brought straight in.

I said all that at the time—but as a new Back Bencher, I would never have managed to speak if there had been a guillotine. I sat for hours waiting to contribute to many of those debates, and on clause after clause I failed to do so. Had there been a guillotine, I would never have made it.

The House is about the awkward squad, because it is the awkward squad that goes into the detail of legislation. I have heard Members from the minority parties talk about how good it is to timetable legislation. I am amazed and horrified by the idea that they, of all people, think that we should let any Government—it does not matter of which

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

party; I opposed my own Government on detailed constitutional legislation—have their way on such a matter without debate.

The reason why so many amendments were tabled to the Bill is that we know not what will follow. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has made that point many times. For example, among the amendments that I have tabled is No. 142, which would add to the back of the Bill a little device allowing the Scottish and Welsh people to say whether they thought that there should be a second referendum after the detailed devolution legislation had been enacted.

My amendment has not even been selected, so it will not be debated, and such a device is unlikely to be used. Yet surely only when the detailed legislation has been passed by the House can we go to the people and say to them, "Is this what you said you wanted? Because it does not work—or at least, some of us think that it does not—and here are the reasons why." That must be the right device. The reason why there was so much outrage—it was not synthetic outrage—about what happened last night was because, behind closed doors there was a debate in Cabinet. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes, we know that there was a debate, and we probably know that the Leader of the House said, "This is not the way to go."

However, the others must have replied, "Don't worry. We have a big majority and we can do anything we like. The House of Commons doesn't matter. What the heck does it matter? We can shut it up any time we like. Let's do it now, before that lot are organised, before they can get themselves sorted out. Ram it through, no problems. When it comes to the vote, they won't know what they are voting on, and will probably say, 'Yes, yes, let them have it. We don't have to worry about the devolution debate. Don't worry, just pass it. Then, we can say that the devolution legislation doesn't have to be taken on the Floor of the House, because the people have said, basically, that they want it. Furthermore, for that same reason—because the people have said that they want it—the legislation should go through at great speed." That would be the beginning of a serious abuse of authority, which I predict will happen as a result of the measures that we shall pass in the next few weeks.

There are many unanswered questions about thresholds, and about the disfranchisement of people such as my parents. Until five years ago, they lived in Scotland, and they voted in the previous devolution referendum. For reasons of ill health, they had to move to another part of England, but their hearts still lie in that country. [HON. MEMBERS: "Another part of England?"] Yes, they moved to another part of England.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is Scotland a part of England?

Mr. Duncan Smith: No, I did not refer to that. I said that my parents moved to another part of England, having previously at one stage also been there. The hon. Gentleman must be careful about how he interprets words.

Mr. Wigley: So must the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The reality is that those who have their hearts in a particular country, and have a view and a reason to vote, will have no say. We can argue not one jot on that, or on the levels that will be taken during the course of the devolution debate.

We are seeing an arrogance, not because what is being done has not been done before, but because of the way in which the Government are driving the legislation through Parliament. I say to the Back Benchers who sit on the Government side, silent as the grave, nodding quietly in acquiescence with their Government, that in due course they will find that their Government will act against their interests.

Every day that those Back Benchers watch their Government wind this place up, they watch them wind away their chance to debate or to change things on behalf of their constituents. I say good luck to them, but I add, "Don't come back to us and apologise in a year's time."

5.23 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): With all due respect to the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), I think that most hon. Members know that the reason why there was no guillotine on the Maastricht legislation was simply that the Government could not carry a guillotine motion on the Floor of the House. It was not because of any principle on their part.

The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said that, when he was in a position to manage such matters, he would never have countenanced such an action. However, when the right hon. Gentleman was chairman of the Conservative party and the Maastricht legislation was running into trouble in the House, there was no guillotine simply because such a motion would not have been carried.

Once we remove the whiff of humbug that the Secretary of State for Scotland described earlier—large lumps of House of Commons humbug would be a better description—the truth is that if Members of Parliament are in favour of particular legislation they support guillotines, but if they are against the legislation, they are fiercely against the guillotine.

I make an honourable exception for the Liberal party, because I understand that although, it is against the legislation—if I interpret Liberal Members' statements correctly they intend to vote against the referendum legislation—they are still sympathetic to the guillotine.

In 10 years in the House, I have voted for only one guillotine motion, so I suspect that I have voted for fewer guillotines than almost any other Member now in opposition. My experience is that people's support or otherwise for guillotines is basically determined by their support or otherwise for the legislation concerned.

The humbug arises because of the identity of the Members making the charges of arrogance and insensitivity. The Government have been guilty of arrogance in their short period in office; there is no doubt about that. However, the charge comes from the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), who, during his time as Home Secretary, was not noted for his humility in his approach to a whole variety of public business.

There are some colourful characters in my constituency who occupy the sheriff courts day in and day out, but I do not know any one of them who has had as many court

judgments against him as the right hon. and learned Gentleman did during his term of office as Home Secretary. For such a charge to come from the Conservative Front Bench takes some stomaching for the rest of us, who over the past few years have been subjected to guillotine after guillotine by those self same people.

I think that the Government should have waited until the debate had started. They should have let the filibuster become clear before they introduced the guillotine. The guillotine motion should have been looser, too. They have over-restricted debate, especially at the end of the debates on some of the amendments.

However, in response to the sort of amendments that have been tabled over the past 10 days, let me say that, basically, I support the timetabling of the Bill. Some of the amendments have been called frivolous. They are more than frivolous, they are insulting. Do Conservative Members not realise that it is insulting to the people of Scotland and Wales to table St. Andrew's day amendments and daylight hours amendments?

Sir Patrick Cormack: Those were not selected.

Mr. Salmond: No, but they were tabled by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues. Surely the nature of those amendments tells us something about the nature of many Conservative Back Benchers' approach to the legislation.

Serious issues arise on the Bill, such as whether it is needed at all. In my view, it is at best an unnecessary delay, and at worst a dangerous gamble. Another serious issue is the number of questions that should be asked. The Liberal Democrats' amendment, which we may debate later, is perfectly valid.

In Scotland and in Wales, the idea of a multi-option referendum is a big issue, and there is massive support for one, with a majority in every party supporting the concept. I noted that one of the contenders for the Conservative leadership is also on the record as supporting a multi-option referendum. He is in opposition now, of course. The present Secretary of State for Scotland, too, supported such a referendum when he was in opposition, but the concept seems to grow somewhat distant when people are in government.

Those issues will be debated and voted on. I do not think that sufficient time has been allowed, but none the less, they will be debated and voted upon.

The shadow Home Secretary chose to highlight as one of his major objections the issue of thresholds. He told the House that that was a key issue, and therefore the guillotine motion was not appropriate. Rightly, in view of the likely timetable, he said that that issue would not force a debate or a vote.

At an earlier stage in our proceedings, I challenged the right hon. and learned Gentleman on that precise question, and asked him whether the Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen would table blocking devices, involving 40 per cent. rules—or even 50 per cent. rules, which another of the contenders for the Tory crown has been talking about recently.

The shadow Home Secretary replied:

"The hon. Gentleman will have to restrain himself. In due course, he will see exactly what amendments the Opposition table".—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1997: Vol. 294, c. 735.]

As the Liberal Democrats have pointed out, as of yesterday, Opposition Front-Bench, as opposed to the Back-Bench, Members had tabled no amendments whatsoever on the matter. From Tory Back Benchers we have had 33, 40 and even 50 per cent. rules, but, until the amendments tabled yesterday and the starred amendments that appear on the Order Paper today, we had had nothing from Opposition Front Benchers. Even when new clauses 23, 24 and 25 were tabled yesterday, they were not about 40 or 50 per cent. rules but referred to the percentage of people voting—the turn-out in the referendum. I am glad that those amendments are not going to be treated seriously by the House. The reintroduction of that concept into politics disfigures democratic debate.

The Minister for Education and Industry, Scottish Office is sitting on the Government Front Bench. He will remember from the previous referendum that the 40 per cent. rule was eventually attacked by both sides in the debate because it disfigured the way in which the debate was conducted. The idea that people could stay at home and influence the result of a democratic ballot was deeply disabling to democracy.

Mr. Wigley: People could even die.

Mr. Salmond: As the hon. Gentleman says, people who died at an inconvenient time would have been counted as against in the 1979 referendum in Scotland. In 1979, I was registered twice, once as a student and once at my home address. Because the registers of postal ballots were not published, I was not able to vote by post in St. Andrews. One of my potential votes was therefore counted against in the 1979 referendum. I legitimately appeared twice on the electoral roll but was entitled to vote only once. All those complexities were introduced by manipulation of the ballot and the 40 per cent. rule.

Internationally, if there had been a 40 per cent. rule in the Maastricht referendum in France, it would never have passed. Greenland would still be in the European Union. Perhaps we can understand now the objectives behind the Tory Back-Bench attempts to secure 33, 40 and 50 per cent. rules. More appropriately for the Conservative party, if we convert the Tory vote in Scotland to a percentage of the total electorate, the figure does not even reach the dizzy heights of 17 per cent.; it is 12.5 per cent.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills): The same applies to the hon. Gentleman's party.

Mr. Salmond: It does not. Firstly, we got more votes, but, more importantly, I am not arguing from the dizzy heights of a mandate of 12.5 per cent. of the total electorate that there should be a 33, 40 or 50 per cent. stipulation in a referendum Bill. If there had been a 40 per cent. rule in general elections, no UK Government would have been elected since the second world war—and a good thing too, many of my constituents might say.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman wants to do everything to assist the break-up of the United Kingdom, which is why he supports the guillotine. I accept that he has views on the amendments, but who is he—who is anyone—to say that we should not even debate new clause 19, which deals with thresholds? I would be prepared to withdraw all my other amendments to get a proper debate on that measure.

Mr. Salmond: If that offer had been communicated to the Government earlier, perhaps we would not be having

[Mr. Salmond]

this debate. I have already said, if the hon. Gentleman was listening, that the guillotine should have been looser and that the debate should have started before the guillotine was introduced. However, no intelligent layman looking at the nature of the amendments could come to a conclusion other than that Conservative Members were involved in a deliberate wrecking mechanism aimed at immersing the Bill in parliamentary procedure for a long time.

Mr. Jenkin *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman underrates his wrecking powers. He was parliamentary private secretary to the previous Secretary of State for Scotland, who argued for such a referendum. It seems strange that those of us who did not want a referendum want the Bill to go through or, at least, not to be bogged down in parliamentary procedure, while he now declares that he is fiercely opposed to the whole process.

Humbug is on display from both Labour and Opposition Members. The House has come to adopt arguments for convenience. Members who favour legislation are, by and large, sympathetic to guillotines. If Members are against a Bill, they invoke all sorts of constitutional arguments as to why the Government should not do something that they would have most certainly have done in government if the position had been reversed. I suggest that we will reach a position where we can make progress for Scotland and Wales, and do so in reasonable time.

5.34 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) made a good attempt at debating new clause 19, which he deplored and said should never have been tabled. A great deal of humbug, to use his term, has been talked about the frivolity of the amendments. It is important to nail this one. No Committee Chairman—the Secretary of State for Scotland can smile as much as he likes—chooses wrecking or frivolous amendments. If he sought to do so, he would be dissuaded by the excellent advice of his Clerks. The fact that there are amendments on the amendment paper that may be described as frivolous is neither here nor there. They have not been selected, so they will not be debated. The argument is totally false.

I have voted against guillotines proposed by my party when in government. I deplore the foreclosure of legitimate debate by whomsoever it is proposed. I remember once saying in a guillotine debate when we were in government that we should never do things that we would not wish to be done to us. That has always been my maxim in this place.

Sensible timetabling is one thing, but a draconian timetable is very different. I have always favoured sensible timetabling of debates. I remember once leaving the Chamber in disgust when an important Bill was being discussed and it was not possible to debate many of its key aspects. That is always deplorable. The Government are doing that to the House, and doing it quite needlessly. They could have entered into an agreement for sensible timetabling through the usual channels. The shadow Leader of the House made that plain in his first comment last night. We would then have had adequate debate on all the Bill's essential aspects.

I lay aside for the moment the question whether the threshold should be debated. Personally, I think that it should be. In any case, no one could deny that, central to the Bill, is the additional question on the ballot paper. I have tabled an amendment on that. The leader of the Scottish National party and I agree about the importance of that, although we come at it from different angles. I am a passionate believer in preserving the integrity of the United Kingdom; he takes a different line. I respect his view, although I profoundly disagree with it. Most profoundly of all, I disagree with the fact that the House will have only an hour and a half, including probably little more than an hour of Back-Bench speeches, to discuss that vital matter. That is to treat the House with disdain approaching contempt.

Mr. Wallace: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Patrick Cormack: In a moment. On Second Reading a fortnight ago, I said that I felt that the seeds of our troubles were sown when we got a very large majority in 1983. I quoted with some approbation the remarks of the much-castigated Lord Pym. I told Labour Members that, having understandably indulged in some euphoria, there was a danger that they would allow that euphoria to lapse into arrogance. We are already seeing that.

The House should not be treated with contempt by any Government, and especially by a Government who have many Back-Bench Members who will not, during the course of this Parliament, have any other opportunity to develop or deploy their talents than in the Chamber. Many of them will not be able to aspire to ministerial office; many of them will not become members of Select Committees; many of them will have only one place in which to exercise their talents, and that is the Chamber. That is no bad thing, in a way, because the Chamber should be the cockpit of the nation. It should be the place where we truly, properly and thoroughly discuss issues of great moment.

If, however, the Government are to pursue the course on which they have embarked this afternoon, they are delivering a blow that will lead to a cancerous frustration among their own Back-Bench Members. They are not allowing adequate and proper debate. If we had had four days to consider the Bill rather than two, I would have considered that a reasonable allocation of time. There would then have been a proper opportunity for reasonable debate on all the outstanding issues that are before us.

The Government would have suffered not at all. They would not have lost their legislation. We must be realistic enough to accept that the Government will get their legislation. At least their legislation would have been subject to some proper debate and more real scrutiny if we had been given four days rather than two. Those responsible for that legislation would have had to answer detailed and critical questions arising from the amendments at the Dispatch Box. What is more, there would have been a proper chance to vote on a number of amendments. That is a chance that we are being denied by an extremely ungenerous timetable.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: Surely the parallel with the remark made or warning given by Lord Pym about the

abuse of power by a party with a huge majority is entirely inappropriate to the Bill that is before us. Indeed, there is no parallel. Lord Pym was warning us about a Government bent on centralising power, who had a very large majority to enable them to do just that. The Bill before us is about decentralising power. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways and accuse the Government of being arrogant about giving away some of their powers to the people of Scotland and Wales and subsequently, subject to referendums, to Assemblies and Parliaments in Scotland and Wales.

Sir Patrick Cormack: The hon. Gentleman misses the point completely. I am warning about the arrogance of a Government, bolstered by an enormous majority, who feel that they can act as a juggernaut or steamroller and push everything through this place without adequate debate. It is—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman can sit in his place and shout as much as he likes. He can blow his top as often as he wants.

Whatever the hon. Gentleman may say, these are issues that arouse passion and real differences of opinion in this country. When I say "this country", I mean the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That is "this country" as far as I am concerned.

I have referred to the honourable difference of opinion that I have with the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, the leader of the Scottish National party. He passionately wants to see a fully independent Scotland. That is a legitimate aspiration and a reasonable ambition for him to hold. I have always respected the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, as the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) knows. The hon. Lady and I debated against each other during the devolution debates in the 1970s. I respect their position, but I profoundly disagree with it.

The motion before us annoys me because we are not being given an adequate opportunity to debate important issues in the Chamber. We know that the Government will not withdraw their allocation of time motion, but I beg them to be more sensible and sensitive when it comes to the substantive devolution legislation, which will come before us later this year. It is crucial that it is taken properly on the Floor of the House.

It follows from what I have already said that I do not object to a sensible and structured timetabling arrangement, but it must be one that does not prevent or stifle debate. It must provide adequate opportunity for us to test the various issues. To my mind, it is an insult to Parliament that we are not debating that legislation before we have the referendum. I entirely agree with what the very hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said about the need for a further referendum after we have passed, assuming we do, devolution legislation.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: That is Michael Forsyth's position.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Indeed, that is Michael Forsyth's position. Sadly he is not here to argue it—would that he were.

I am aware that there are other hon. Members who wish to take part in the debate. That being so, I shall conclude my remarks by reiterating what I consider to be the most important point that I have sought to make this afternoon, which is that the Government are treating the House with disdain approaching contempt. If they continue so to do, they will be sowing the seeds of their own destruction.

The Government should remember that on their Benches are serried ranks of new Members. They are glad that they are here and understandably rejoicing in the often unexpected triumphs that brought them to this place. They are men and women who will want to play a proper and structured part in debates on legislation that is put before us. If the Government deny them that opportunity, they will breed a resentment from which they will rightly suffer.

5.45 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge–Brownhills): I am glad that I was returned to this place in the recent general election, if only because I have heard for the first time—I knew that it would happen—a Conservative Front Bench spokesman speak against the guillotine. I have lived within these premises for nearly 18 years, and I have watched the Conservative Front Bench turn the guillotine into a constitutional device for destroying debate and the free expression of the people of this country.

We reached the position where we devised even more ways in which we could screw down public debate. We anticipated even Second Readings by insisting on a guillotine before they took place. We guillotined a new constitutional innovation. We guillotined Lords amendments before they had even come before us. That was the effect of our guillotine legislation. To hear my Front-Bench colleagues say that the guillotine is inappropriate cheers me and a wider circle of people who believe in Conservative trust, worthwhile government and honest principle.

As I said that, the then Opposition Members rose, as indignantly as I have heard Opposition Members today, to oppose every measure that came before us, including what became the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 and the anticipatory legislation that was introduced before the 1992 general election. Legislation was taken on a shovel. That is what we reduced the House to.

The danger of that approach is that it creates cynicism. By moving from one side of the Chamber to the other, we have the same rubbish thrown back at us. Let us not be in any doubt that the Bill is a major constitutional issue. It is inappropriate to introduce a guillotine because the Bill touches on the most delicate and important of all flowers in this nation of ours—and that is our Union. We have the absurd position of the Scottish National party, which, on the one hand, wants full integration with the union of Europe, but, on the other, wishes to smash the only Union that is of importance to many many of us.

What do I mean by "many many of us"? The 1991 census told us that 680,000 or 690,000 Scots-born people over the age of 18 were living in England. Similarly, about 500,000 Welsh-born people are living in England. Are they to be casually disfranchised? It is difficult to express the passion that brings together nearly 290 years, as it will be this year, of consanguinity and common language.

[Mr. Richard Shepherd]

If we hear rage and concern, it is because there is extremely deep concern that in the turning of this particular key and the opening of this door we walk through to something that is of profound importance and will be to the disadvantage of the Union.

Mr. Dalyell: As the hon. Gentleman knows, many of us on the opposite side of the Chamber have respected him greatly in these debates. But what rights does he think that the Scots in Aldridge-Brownhills have to participate in the proposed referendum? I should be extremely interested in his answer.

Mr. Shepherd: I was trying to explain, and I am sorry that I did not inform the House well enough. I am saying that we, each one of us, as part of a Union have a right to express our view on the nature and shape of that Union.

I wanted to move on to the second proposition. If we are to nationalise parts of the Union and bring back the feeling of Scottishness, Welshness and Englishness, how can we leave out of the equation, in the great affirmation of Scotland, the reason why I, who was born in Scotland, should be denied a vote on the future of the country for which I have sentiment and feeling, and which I believe should be part of an integral United Kingdom?

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman may remember that a few years ago members of the Politburo in the old Soviet Union believed that referendums such as those in the Baltic states should have been conducted across the whole of the Soviet Union. Did the hon. Gentleman support that view at that time?

Mr. Shepherd: I have not often come into contact with the honourable leader of the Scottish National party, but it is absurd if Scotland is reduced to such trivia when dealing with these important matters. I am talking about consanguinity: no one has suggested that the Soviet Union was an area of consanguinity. We have been united by marriage and blood over several centuries.

Mr. Wallace: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shepherd: No, I want to explain why I want to attack the guillotine motion.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shepherd: No, I said no. The hon. Gentleman has spoken. I want to explain why I oppose this measure.

Almost half a million Welsh men and women live in England. Very few hon. Members could not trace a line to some part of the United Kingdom, which gives us a locus in equality on this matter. But that has been cast aside and we shall not even be able to discuss these issues.

I want to refer to the reputations of Governments. There were three guillotine motions during the Attlee Government and another three up to 1971, while in the 1980s under Mrs. Thatcher there were almost 60. Until circumstances reduced him, my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) instituted the course that was taken by the previous Government, to which I referred in my opening remarks. Such practice slowly changes the nation's mind. People perceive Governments as arrogant or not sensitive enough to the basic political questions of the age. The Labour party is the great beneficiary of that.

The Government should not knock the genuinely expressed anxieties about the future of the Union. The simplicity of some of our amendments may not be to the satisfaction of some hon. Members, and they may have been excluded by the Chairman of Ways and Means, but they are not criticisms of substance; they are anxieties that have been raised. The House should be able to discuss familiar and important matters: that is the purpose of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. We should consider the sensitivities and difficulties of English representatives who are trying to ensure that the referendum consolidates and does not break the Union. Many hon. Members want to preserve the Union. If that is the Government's ambition, I share it.

My fear is that we will not have sufficient time to reflect on people's niggles and anxieties. My mother lived in this country for 50 years. The Scottish nationalists may ask, "What does she know about Scotland?" It is a fact that, because of our language, we are informed about each area of the Union.

I ask the Government to reflect on this small measure, as they put it, because however persuasive the Secretary of State for Scotland may be, we fear that it is perhaps the beginning of the unravelling of what I call the most important Union for everyone in the House. Please listen to what we are saying, and reflect on the fact that the process by which the measure is achieved is important to the standing of the new Government and to the regard in which they are held.

5.53 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (West Renfrewshire): I have listened to the debate, and I am astounded and stunned by the thoughts expressed by Conservative Members. We have had 18 years of Tory rule, and we have fought the general election. I have been in the House for 10 years, and I can safely say that during that time hardly a week or a month went by without the people of Scotland saying, "When will we get rid of the Tories? When will we have a Scottish Parliament of our own? When will our destinies be in our own hands?" The Tories have not learnt that lesson, and they have been wiped out in Scotland.

I have great respect for the hon. Members for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack): they are men of integrity and have made many speeches in the House. I do not like the guillotine any more than they do. However, the people of Scotland are sick and tired of waiting. They have been waiting for a devolved Parliament for more than 20 years. They are desperate, and they think that there has been enough talk. They want to see the establishment of that Parliament in Scotland; they want to participate and they want the services that a Scottish Parliament will decide on and deliver. It is not for us to continue the never ending story. If we talk, talk, talk, the people of Scotland will go for another 50 years without a proper Parliament.

I should have liked to debate the issues, but 240 nonsensical, wrecking amendments were tabled. Conservative Members could have tabled 20 amendments and spoken for an hour on each. Hon. Members should remember that this debate is being watched by the people

of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. People in other countries are also watching it, and they will not see us fail to deliver what we promised to the people in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Graham: I will let the hon. Gentleman intervene in a minute.

Do hon. Members seriously think that the people of Scotland are half daft, and that we are still living in the days of the Picts and go about painted? We are not. We are educated people, and we can see quite clearly when the Opposition are out to wreck a measure for which the people of Scotland have spoken. There is not one Labour Member who did not put into his election address that he wanted a Scottish Parliament. We did not kid anyone in Scotland: we told them clearly that we want a Scottish Parliament.

We also came up with a referendum. The Labour party argued about whether it was for or against a referendum: yes, yes, no, yes, no. The Tories had a meeting in Scotland in a big tent. They had a pow-wow in a wigwam, but they could not smoke the peace pipe because they had broken it. They do not have a clue. They still do not understand that in a democracy we must listen to the people. The people of Scotland have put their cross on the ballot paper: they want a Labour Government and they want the House to deliver a Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Surely the point is that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends stood in the general election on their belief in devolution. Does he not agree that the problem is that we are putting the cart before the horse? If the Government put the devolution argument and then asked the people of Scotland to decide, we would not have this problem. The question could be put through the House quickly and then the people of Scotland could be asked. Why not have it that way?

Mr. Graham: The hon. Gentleman would make a fortune in the Glasgow Playhouse. That was comedy at its worst. The people of Scotland have said clearly that they want a Parliament. If the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene again, I will be happy to listen to him.

Mr. Duncan Smith: My point is that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends stood on a platform of devolution and a Scottish Parliament. Why do the Government not debate the devolution legislation on the Floor of the House? With their majority, it would no doubt be passed. They could then ask the people of Scotland whether that is what they want.

Mr. Graham: How long has the hon. Gentleman been in the House? I have been here 10 years. The Tory Government never listened to us. We asked them to come up with a devolved Parliament and an Assembly: we pleaded with them, and we tried to do deals to ensure that it would happen. So did the Scottish National party, which has wanted their question on independence. I would not deny them. When the Tories had the opportunity, they did nothing for the people of Scotland.

The people of Scotland have done the business, so the House should also do the business. We have binned the Tories, and the only way back for them is to start listening to the people of Scotland and to take steps to come into line and ensure that we have a meaningful Scottish Parliament.

I am sitting here listening tonight, but Conservative Members do not listen to the message that is coming from Tories in Scotland. They are dumb, and when they are dumb they cannot think. Certainly, they are not speaking on behalf of Scottish Tories. They have given that up. The hon. Member for Aldridge–Brownhills has integrity; if we do not have such integrity in Scotland, the United Kingdom will be split asunder. The Tories should not run away from the argument. They should say that, if the people of Scotland want a Parliament, we should all work together to deliver the goods.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: May I make a simple point? We are expressing outrage about a guillotine motion. I think that we all want to engage in the subsequent development of the argument; it is the guillotine on discussion that we oppose. I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that there may be a settled will in Scotland.

Mr. Graham: I understand where the hon. Gentleman is coming from and I understand where some other Opposition Members are coming from, but I know that the rest, deep down, want a mechanism to stop the process in its tracks because their view about Scottish devolution is so deeply entrenched. I have read some of the nonsense that has come from those who used to be Ministers.

I could be here all night, but I shall not be. I believe that the people of Scotland want devolution now, and I believe that the guillotine motion is appropriate. There has been enough talking. We want a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, serving the needs of the people of Scotland. It is time that the Tory party realised that; otherwise, it will never again play a part in global politics in Scotland.

6.1 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I regret the terms of the motion, but I deplore even more the arguments that have been assembled in favour of it.

First, we were told that this was somehow not a constitutional Bill. My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) blew that argument right out of the water. The Prime Minister thought that this was a constitutional Bill. Replying to me earlier, the Secretary of State described it as a small technical measure; yet on Second Reading his own Minister of State said that these were "not technical measures", and that after the referendum the Government would act in accordance with the results. I urge Government Front Benchers, if they want to retain any credibility in the matter, to say once and for all today whether or not this is a constitutional measure.

Secondly, the Government tried to justify the guillotine motion in a way in which I have never heard any timetable motion justified, speaking of the need to eliminate amendments that were either frivolous or esoteric. My amendment No. 121, which will be eliminated by the timetable motion, proposes arrangements for service men serving overseas to vote in the referendum. The amendment is not phrased in my own words, but precisely reflects the wording of an amendment making special arrangements for service men that the then Labour Government tabled to the last referendum Bill back in

[Mr. Michael Fallon]

1975. There are many Scottish service men serving in Scottish regiments overseas who will not be able to vote in the referendum because my amendment will now not even be debated, let alone voted on.

The suggestion that the timetable motion is needed to eliminate amendments that are frivolous or esoteric goes further: it usurps the function of the Chairman of Ways and Means and the Clerks who advise him. The whole point of selecting amendments is that those that they regard as frivolous are not selected for debate. Furthermore, the timetable motion itself is unnecessary, because of the selection that the Chairman has made. Because of the way in which he has grouped amendments—in large groups, by large subjects—it would have been perfectly possible for the Government to secure their business by, if necessary, moving closure motions after two or three hours of debate on each group.

Finally, the Government have argued that there is a need for speed, not because of some legislative log jam, not because this is the last Session of a Parliament, not because of any special legislative requirements in terms of Scottish legislation—oh no. In the heat of the moment, the Leader of the House gave the game away last night, justifying the need for speed in the following terms:

"If we did not take steps to ensure that there was a referendum in Scotland and one in Wales in the autumn we would be breaking a manifesto commitment."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. 132.]

That is the start of a slide towards an elective dictatorship, putting the doctrine of the mandate ahead of the authority of the House. We should reject the motion today, and we should reject even more firmly the arguments advanced to sustain it.

6.5 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I follow what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) by asking, why the rush? When we wonder why the Government will not answer that question, we need to consider what is the source of the referendum in the first place. All those Members on the Government side now arguing in favour of a referendum originally never had the idea of a referendum in their heads. The referendum policy was thought up to serve as a sticking plaster to cover the splits in the Labour party over devolution, which were emerging when it was still in opposition.

What we want now is a referendum—that is the Opposition's policy, if these proposals are to be put to the Scottish people—but after the legislation has been passed. We want a referendum that will really establish what is the settled will of the Scottish people. The Government want this rush because the last thing that they want the Scottish people to do is seriously to consider the content and meaning of the referendum proposals. Let me tell the hon. Member for West Renfrewshire (Mr. Graham) that that is what happened last time: they thought about it. The hon. Gentleman was elected on a mandate for a referendum, not a mandate for a Scottish Parliament. Whatever he personally may believe, there is no mandate for a Scottish Parliament—only a mandate for a referendum.

The referendum should consider all the issues, and all the details of the legislation. It should not be a referendum on a general question that will be thrown at the Scottish people while the Government are still enjoying their honeymoon, and what the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), described as a loyalty vote in the new Labour Government.

I agree entirely with what my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said earlier. Frustration will be stored up among Labour Members who really want to speak out on the issue. I remember the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells), describing the programme for devolution as the Balkanisation of Britain. It is no surprise that the Scottish nationalists are supporting the proposal: they know that a headlong rush to settle the question as quickly as possible, before people have proper time to consider it, is the best way to separate Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom. That is why we are so angry about the way in which the guillotine motion has been tabled. We need to debate the issues seriously, and to debate all the issues that arise in the amendments.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): If the hon. Gentleman seriously wants a genuine debate, why does he table so many frivolous amendments?

Mr. Jenkin: I think that the hon. Gentleman has been in the House long enough to know the nature of the probing amendment. Moreover, he well knows that the process of submitting amendments can be something of a lottery, because hon. Members never know which will be selected. We tabled many respectable amendments and some of them have been selected for debate. The hon. Gentleman does not dare to discuss them because he knows that the longer the Scottish people have to think about the proposals, the less enamoured of them they will be. He is involved in stifling the debate and he hopes to rush the measure through without proper thought because that is the only basis on which the referendum was acceptable to him.

The decision to have a referendum was taken not in Edinburgh or Glasgow but by the Islington branch of the new Labour party, much to the consternation of many Labour Members. It is about the management of the Labour party. The new Labour Government are desperately trying to contain their massive majority before their Back Benchers become restless and unhelpful. The Government know that the devolution measures could turn out to be their Maastricht if they allow them the consideration that they deserve.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): No doubt the hon. Gentleman's remarks are highly coloured by his probing adventure into Scottish politics. He will recall the number of votes that he received on that occasion. He talks about respectable amendments. Is the amendment calling for the referendum to be held on a Sunday respectable?

Mr. Jenkin: It is certainly reasonable to discuss the day on which a referendum might be held. I am surprised that the hon. Lady should remember my modest foray into Scottish politics. I am glad that I left such a good impression.

6.11 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): The debate was graced by the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams), who spoke well of her

fascinating constituency. I came to know it quite well and I share her admiration for it. She said that she would have been more comfortable speaking in the language of heaven, which is her native tongue. She spoke well in her second language and we all welcome her to the House. The hon. Lady's speech was a good advertisement for Parliament, and it was a relief to hear such a speech from a Labour Member.

The House heard the first speech following his return to the House of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude). We welcome him back. He reminded us that hon. Members have roles and rights and that the House has rights. He said that democracy involves not only the majority having its way, but the minority having its say. He told the House that Ministers have said that constitutional issues would get maximum debate and that there would be maximum participation. There has been no sign of the Government honouring that commitment.

Another colleague who has returned to the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), said that his amendment was about the voting rights of service men. He dispelled the excuse for the guillotine that has been peddled by the Government, that the amendments are frivolous trivia. That argument is indefensible in the light of my hon. Friend's speech.

The Secretary of State for Scotland was reduced to saying that the Bill will not alter the constitution, but will simply try to pave the way for doing that. Is not the way in which we conduct referendums part of our constitution? Are the rules, procedures and arrangements for them not an important part of our constitutional arrangements? Precedents from 1977 and 1978 were quoted. Do not they remind us that every referendum shapes our unwritten constitution? Labour Members propose endless referendums without any thought for their consequences on the constitution. The holding of a referendum in advance of legislation is in itself a regrettable change in constitutional practice.

The Secretary of State for Scotland said that the Bill was a modest measure which could easily be guillotined. I think that it was my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) who reminded us that two weeks ago the right hon. Gentleman said that the measure was of great importance. Now it has become modest, and we are told that we need not worry too much about debate on it being curtailed. If the measure is so modest, why will the Committee stage be taken in the Chamber? The Government cannot have it both ways, but the right hon. Gentleman spoke about a modest measure as if the Government were asking for permission to hold an opinion poll. He said that it was modest because it was short, but not everything that is short is modest, otherwise there would be much more modesty in the Chamber.

The Bill raises fundamental questions about our constitution and about the use of referendums. It also raises important questions about whether people should be presented with proposals that have not been subjected to detailed scrutiny; about what happens when Parliament is told that such scrutiny is unnecessary because a referendum has been carried; about who should vote in referendums; and about whether the question in a referendum should be specific or the kind of vague generality that the Government want to put to the people.

Mr. Wallace: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: No, because I shall come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

The Bill raises important questions about whether there should be agreed procedures for the conduct and financing of referendums. However, there are to be short debates or no debates at all on all those issues.

In opening the debate for the Opposition, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) said that the first duty of Parliament was to debate legislation. He reminded us that when Michael Foot guillotined devolution Bills in the 1970s, he did it after 30 days of debate. His complaint was that hon. Members had already spoken too much. One of the complaints of Labour Members now is that not enough Opposition Members have spoken in the debates so far on these matters.

There is no precedent that Labour Members would like to look at in detail for the action that they propose. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe showed that the guillotine is not simply about limiting debate, but about denying it. The effect of the motion will be that the referendum procedures, the possibility of asking the people of Wales about tax-raising powers, the financing of the campaigns and the issue of a majority threshold cannot be debated. Are those trivial and esoteric questions which can easily be cast aside? Are they not worthy of being debated for at least an hour or of a single comment by the Government? Do they not deserve cursory examination by the mother of Parliaments?

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised the Gary McAllister question. I suspect that that will join the West Lothian and Bury North questions and become part of our political language. The hon. Gentleman asked questions that Ministers have not answered and propose to skate over.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) took issue with the assertion that the merits of a guillotine could be determined by the number of hon. Members who were present on Second Reading. At the end of Second Reading there were still some hon. Members waiting to take part, and among them was my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green. He reminded us that if the Government were truly intent on modernising our procedures, they would do it with the interests of hon. Members in mind rather than solely the interests of the Government. He said that it is the duty of the Leader of the House to stand up for its rights and to strike a balance between the Government's wish to get its business through and the need for Parliament to give that business proper scrutiny.

The behaviour of the Leader of the House on this matter has been a disgrace. After she had made her statement yesterday evening, she scuttled out of the House while points of order about it were still being raised. She has not managed to scuttle back in to hear the winding-up speeches. Within a month of taking on her responsibilities, she has been bullied into surrendering rights of the House by the Secretaries of State for Scotland

[Mr. Hague]

and for Wales. I have never seen the Secretary of State for Scotland as a bully and I am disappointed in him. However, we all know that the Secretary of State for Wales is a bully and the right hon. Lady should have seen him coming. She should have known that she would have to resist such attacks when she took on her responsibilities.

If the Leader of the House believes in a timetable, why was one not offered to the Opposition? If she desires the orderly passage of business with adequate debate, why did she not discuss the terms of the timetable with the Opposition? The excuses that the right hon. Lady gave last night were pathetic. She said:

"It is a simple, straightforward Bill with only six clauses."

If it is so simple and straightforward, how come Ministers have not yet managed to answer most of the simple, straightforward questions about it? *[Interruption.]* Here she is; now she can deal with some of these herself. She said about the Bill:

"The Government also have a clear mandate for it."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. 123.]

However, what she forgot and what she is paid to remember is that hon. Members all have a mandate to scrutinise legislation and to ensure that it receives proper debate. Does she not realise that the confidence of the House in a Minister, above all the Leader of the House, is not automatic but has to be earned? She has done nothing to earn it in the way in which she has abdicated her responsibilities in this matter.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) pointed to some of the dangerous language used by Ministers on this subject: the Secretary of State for Wales had said that he would brook no interference in dealing with these matters; and the Prime Minister had said that it would be game playing not to legislate with all possible speed on the matter. The language that the Government have used is deeply unappealing to people who believe in open debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) reminded us that sensible timetabling is one thing, but draconian timetabling is another. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) spoke powerfully of the inappropriateness of guillotining a Bill that may have lasting consequences for the Union of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) reminded us that the only reason why the Government are in a rush to hold referendums and to secure the Bill is that they fear the consequences of sustained debate about the detailed proposals that they have yet to produce for the benefit of this Parliament and of the people of this country.

What that adds up to is a growing streak of arrogance in the Government's behaviour. What seemed like carelessness in the first few days they were in office has turned into a habit of overweening arrogance. We saw it with the decision about the Bank of England, which was made without even consulting the Cabinet, in the changes to Prime Minister's Question Time to try to turn it into a weekly yawn, in the changes to questions to other Departments, as was raised at points of order earlier today, and in the huge increase in political and personal appointments by Ministers. Now we see it in the cavalier use of the power to guillotine. It adds up to the arrogant abuse of power. The Government may enjoy it for the moment, but they will certainly regret it in the end.

That arrogance is all the more disturbing when accompanied by Ministers being unable or unwilling to answer clear questions about the implications of the legislation that they have brought to the House. How many of the questions that we asked on Second Reading are still unanswered? A great many. How many will still be unanswered when we finish these curtailed debates in Committee? A great many. The Government have not begun to answer the questions about how devolved systems of government would work. They cannot even answer satisfactorily how the voters in a referendum can assess their answers.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham reminded us, the Prime Minister said that the Bill would be published for people to examine before the referendums were held. Now it has been turned into the White Paper. Are we not to believe what the Prime Minister says in the House? The Government are not able to say how extensive, informative or conclusive that information will be. They are not able to answer the most basic and fundamental questions about their proposal.

We believe that it is right to hold referendums on these proposals, but we believe that the Bill entails holding referendums at the wrong time and in the wrong way, and that it asks voters to approve proposals that are unclear or may be changed afterwards, with the House of Commons being told that it must pass the measure without a fuss because a referendum has approved it.

The use of a referendum to gain a general mandate rather than approval for specific proposals is the use of a referendum as an anti-parliamentary device. Our protest is that the Government are coupling the misuse of one constitutional innovation with the abuse of another. They are bringing about one procedure unsuited to parliamentary democracy by employing another. No wonder so few Government Back Benchers have had either the courage to oppose nor the confidence to voice support for the measure. In the end, they will be the losers, but it is a pity for all concerned that the functioning of the House is the loser in the meantime.

6.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ron Davies): Despite the last comments of the shadow Secretary of State for Wales, I am sure that there is a general understanding in the House that the Government are proceeding in the correct way. *[Interruption.]* I think that there is. I thank the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) for the support that the Liberal Democrats have given to the Government on this matter, and the Scottish National party for its somewhat qualified support for the proposition. I also know that the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who represents Plaid Cymru, is well disposed to the motion.

It is a sad reflection on the state of the Conservative party that it has learned nothing in the past month. It was comprehensively defeated at the general election a month ago and was wiped out in Scotland and Wales. All it is doing is resolutely refusing to recognise that, on the central issue of the way in which Scotland and Wales are governed, it was wrong and is wrong. The Conservative party resolutely clings to the status quo when that status quo is totally discredited.

I remind the shadow Secretary of State of the time when he was Secretary of State for Wales. There are powerful currents running towards democratic government in both Scotland and Wales. The people of Scotland and Wales want to give expression to their national aspirations and to decide their own local priorities in public services. People in Scotland and Wales, and no doubt in the regions of England, wish to find out how best they can develop their own regional economies.

I remind the shadow Secretary of State that there are some Conservatives, certainly some in Wales—the more progressive of them—who do understand the need to modernise our constitution. Let me draw his attention to the remarks of his colleague, the former right hon. Member for Conwy, Sir Wyn Roberts. I take this opportunity to pay my personal tribute to him. He was a witty, dedicated and patriotic Welshman who served his constituency with great distinction. He is the longest-serving Welsh Office Minister we have ever had and, within weeks of leaving that office and leaving government, he recognised that it was time, and that there was a need, to rethink policy on devolution.

That brings me to Sir Wyn's successor, my hon. Friend the Member for Conwy (Mrs. Williams), whom I particularly welcome. She treated us to a marvellous maiden speech. It was passionate and articulate. I know of her love for her new constituency and share her admiration for the beauty of her part of Wales. She spoke eloquently of her native language and our shared culture, and I welcome her determination to democratise our government in Wales. She will be a staunch ally in the referendum campaign that will shortly come.

I agree with the shadow Secretary of State that there need not necessarily have been a guillotine motion before the House this evening. The Bill that is the subject of the guillotine is, of course, a short Bill. It contains six straightforward clauses and two schedules, but, somehow or other, within the space of a few days, that short Bill has attracted 250 amendments, 21 new clauses and 12 new schedules.

Those amendments, new clauses and new schedules were designed not to improve the Bill, but to wreck any chances of an orderly and considered debate. I think that the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland was absolutely right when he accused Opposition Members of overkill. Let me refer the House to new clause 8, which I am sure was not tabled to improve debate. It says:

"Nothing in this Act shall derogate from—

(a) the Union with Scotland Act 1706, The Union with Scotland (Amendment) Act 1707, The Succession to the Crown Act 1707, The Princess Sophia's Precedence Act 1711 or The Demise of the Crown Acts 1702 to 1901 or any Act of Parliament affecting the Crown;

(b) The Wales Act 1535;

(c) The Act of Settlement 1700."

Is the shadow Secretary of State for Wales or the shadow Home Secretary telling us that that new clause is tabled to bring about an orderly, logical and rational debate on the proposition before us? I do not believe that it is.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I am sorry, but time does not allow.

I must ask the House what the Government are supposed to do under those circumstances. The Government are doing precisely what the shadow Secretary of State for Wales and his party would do were they still in government. The choice is quite simple and there should be no misunderstanding. Either the Government would have had to allow a completely uncontrolled filibuster, which would have implications for not only this piece of legislation but all the Government's legislative programme, or they had to act now to ensure a proper timetable for a rational debate and time for all the key issues to be debated.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Garnier *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I listened patiently to both the hon. Members and I want to reply to some of the important points that have been made.

Mr. Jenkin: There is never enough time, is there?

Mr. Davies: No, unfortunately there is not, but we do have a guillotine motion before us.

The Opposition know that their indignation on this matter is entirely synthetic. I shall remind them of the views of Michael Portillo when he was speaking from the Dispatch Box:

"It is known in the House that the reality is a choice between many hours in Committee characterised by filibuster and slow progress, and a number of hours in Committee in which we make reasonable progress."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 1046.]

The timetable motion will allow the House to have an ordered, rational and sensible debate. It will provide for four key debates. I know that many hon. Members have raised the issue of the franchise. When the timetable motion is accepted, there will be an opportunity for a calm, rational and brief debate on the franchise.

Mr. Cash: Brief.

Mr. Davies: Of course the debate will be brief. The Government accept that the alternative is to allow the Conservative party to reduce the proceedings in the House to a degenerate rabble. That is the Conservative party's intention, but the Government will not allow that to happen.

There will be a further opportunity for a debate on the second Scottish question. I understand the position of many of those in the Scottish Liberal Democrat party and the Scottish National party who do not share the Government's view that there should be a second question dealing with tax-raising powers. When the timetable motion is accepted, there will be an opportunity for that debate, so that hon. Members can put their case and a Division can take place.

If and when—*[Interruption.]* The issue of thresholds has been raised from a sedentary position. That issue has been raised in various amendments and Madam Speaker has been responsible for the selection. If the debates on the franchise are brief and the House reaches an early conclusion, there will be an opportunity for a further debate on those matters. It is entirely in the hands

[Mr. Davies]

of Opposition Members. If they wish to use the time available to debate the franchise at length, there will not be time for a debate on thresholds.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davies: I have only a few minutes left and I must finish this point.

The Government's view is clear. We believe that there is no room in the referendum for the artificial introduction of the sort of thresholds that have been mentioned.

Mr. Hague: The right hon. Gentleman said that there will be plenty of time to debate the franchise and the second Scottish question and that there will also be time to debate lots of other things. He cannot hold both those views simultaneously. The guillotine means that there cannot be a debate on the procedures of the referendum, on the arguments about thresholds or on whether the people of Wales should be asked about tax-raising powers. Does he think that that is right?

Mr. Davies: The right hon. Gentleman is wrong. The amendment tabled by Plaid Cymru will allow for a referendum with a range of options. It will provide the multi-choice option. If that amendment is successful, that multi-choice option will be put before the people of Wales. It will presumably include the sort of Parliament that they wish to see, with a range of legislative powers and, presumably, with tax-raising powers. It is precisely so that we can move to a rational debate on those issues that the Government have tabled the timetable motion.

The motion will allow four main debates. There will be one on the franchise, one on the second Scottish question, one on the multi-choice option for Wales and one on the multi-choice option for Scotland.

I want to reply to the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), which is why I did not give way to him. He suggested that there was a choice and that, had there been an offer from the Opposition's business managers, the Government should have accepted it, to ensure that there was no need for a guillotine. The Government would have co-operated with the Opposition if there had been a reasonable prospect of coming to an agreement. It was made clear by the Conservative party's representatives that no guarantees could be given.

The Government have been quite reasonable in allowing two days on the Floor of the House for a debate in Committee on this brief Bill. If the Opposition are not prepared to guarantee that the business will be concluded within those two days, the Government have no option but to proceed with the motion.

The Government have to accept their responsibility to the House of Commons to ensure an orderly debate. During its time in office from 1979, the Conservative party introduced 61 guillotines. There are many precedents for this pre-Committee stage guillotine. This is the first big test of the Conservative party in opposition and it has failed. It has failed to come to terms with its election defeat and failed to understand the consequences of being wiped out in Scotland and Wales.

The Government are determined to modernise the British constitution, and devolution is part of that process. This timetable motion will ensure that the people of Scotland and Wales are given a chance to have their say in that modernisation process. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 420, Noes 154.

Division No. 8] **[6.36 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Thomas
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curtis-Thomas, Ms Clare
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steven
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*

Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward *(Old Bexley & Sidcup)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, William
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Ainsworth and Mr. Bowen Wells.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill:—

Committee

1.—(1) Proceedings in Committee shall be completed at the sittings this day and tomorrow.

(2) At the sitting this day, proceedings on any amendments to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would amend that Clause at any place before the word 'Scotland' at line 6 of page 1 of the Bill,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Seven o'clock.

(3) At the sitting this day, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would leave out the word 'Scotland' at line 6 of page 1 of the Bill and insert other words in its place,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Eight o'clock.

(4) At the sitting tomorrow, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would leave out the words 'and tax-varying powers of a Scottish Parliament' at lines 6 and 7 of page 1 of the Bill and insert other words in their place,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Four o'clock.

(5) At the sitting tomorrow, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 1—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would leave out only the words 'tax-varying powers' at line 6 of page 1 of the Bill and insert other words in their place,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at Six o'clock.

(6) At the sitting tomorrow, the remaining proceedings on Clause 1 and proceedings on any amendments to Clause 2—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would amend the Bill at any place before the word 'propositions' at line 7 of page 2 of the Bill,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at a quarter past Six o'clock.

(7) At the sitting tomorrow, proceedings on any amendment to Clause 2—

(a) which may be selected, and

(b) which would leave out the word 'propositions' at line 7 of page 2 of the Bill,

shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at Eight o'clock.

(8) At the sitting tomorrow, the remaining proceedings in Committee shall be brought to a conclusion, if not previously concluded, at half past Eight o'clock.

(9) On the conclusion of the proceedings in Committee the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question and, if he reports the Bill with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

Report and Third Reading

2. The proceedings on Consideration and on Third Reading shall be completed at the sitting tomorrow and shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

Conclusion of proceedings

3.—(1) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 or 2, the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;

(c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) If, apart from this sub-paragraph, two or more Questions would fall to be put by the Chairman under sub-paragraph (1)(d) in relation to successive Clauses and Schedules, the Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those Clauses and Schedules.

(3) If at the sitting tomorrow

(a) a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 24 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) stands over to Seven o'clock, and

(b) proceedings to which this Order applies have begun before that time,

the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings at that sitting in accordance with paragraph 1 or 2 shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion; and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business) shall apply to remaining proceedings that day on the Bill then being considered.

Order of proceedings

4. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken.

Dilatory motions

5. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown; and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time

6. The following business shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House and may be decided, though opposed, at any hour—

(a) proceedings under paragraph 3(1) or (2);

(b) proceedings to which paragraph 3(3) applies;

(c) proceedings under paragraph 8(1).

Business Committee

7. Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

Supplemental orders

8.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced.

(2) If at the sitting this day or tomorrow the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion under paragraph 1 or 2, no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Recommittal

9.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on Consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages, respectively, for, on or in consequence of recommittal.

(2) No debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and the Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Orders of the Day

Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill

Considered in Committee.

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

REFERENDUM IN SCOTLAND

6.56 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I beg to move amendment No. 2, page 1, line 6, leave out 'Scotland' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 140, in page 1, line 11, leave out 'the persons' and insert 'those United Kingdom citizens'

No. 4, in page 1, line 11, leave out 'persons' and insert

'citizens of the United Kingdom'.

No. 120, in page 1, line 11, at end insert

'were born in Scotland or who have a parent or grand-parent of Scottish birth and who would be entitled to vote as electors at a local government election if they were resident in Scotland and the persons who'.

No. 148, in page 1, line 11, at end insert

'are included in a central register to be established in accordance with Schedule [*Central Register of electors for referendums (Scotland)*] or who'.

No. 82, in page 1, line 13, leave out 'local government' and insert 'general'.

No. 238, in page 1, line 13, leave out 'local government' and insert 'parliamentary'.

No. 5, in page 1, line 13, leave out 'Scotland' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

No. 83, in page 1, line 13, at end insert

'and the citizens of the United Kingdom who would be entitled to vote in a general election in any electoral area of the United Kingdom, who were born in Scotland.'.

No. 149, in page 1, line 13, at end insert

'except that citizens of the European Union who are not also British citizens shall not be entitled to vote.'.

No. 225, in page 1, line 13, at end insert

'who have been registered as local government electors in any Scottish local government register for the past five years or since they were 18, whichever be the shorter period'.

No. 236, in page 1, line 13, at end insert

'or have been entitled to vote as electors at a local government election in any electoral area in Scotland in the previous twenty years'.

No. 121, in page 1, line 13, at end insert—

'( ) Notwithstanding subsection (3) above, an Order in Council under this section may make or enable the Secretary of State to make special provision with respect to persons, or any description of persons, who are members of the forces (as defined in section 46 of the Representation of the People Act 1949) or spouses of such members, and may do so differently with respect to different cases; and any provision so made—

(a) may permit persons to whom it applies to vote in a referendum notwithstanding that they are not duly registered under the Representation of the People Acts, and, if they have or have had an address in Scotland, notwithstanding that the conditions of those Acts as to residence are not satisfied; and

(b) may enable persons to whom it applies to vote at a date earlier than that appointed under subsection (1) of this section and may also enable them to vote at a polling station set up in accordance with that provision or by post.'.

No. 138, in page 1, leave out from beginning of line 14 to end of line 3 on page 2.

No. 7, in page 1, line 14, leave out 'for Scotland'.

No. 213, in page 1, line 15, leave out 'Scotland' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

No. 151, in page 1, line 17, leave out 'local government area' and insert 'parliamentary constituency.'

No. 9, in page 1, line 17, leave out 'Scotland', and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

No. 152, in page 1, line 17, at end insert

'shall himself act as Counting Officer for electors registered in the central register established under Schedule [Central Register of electors for referendums (Scotland)] and shall also set up and maintain that register.'.

No. 13, in page 2, line 3, leave out 'Scotland' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

No. 191, in page 2, line 3, at end add

'and for each Parliamentary constituency publicly at the end of each count.'.

No. 15, in clause 2, page 2, line 5, leave out 'Wales' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

No. 141, in page 2, line 10, leave out 'the persons' and insert 'those United Kingdom citizens'

No. 17, in page 2, line 10, leave out 'persons' and insert

'citizens of the United Kingdom'.

No. 160, in page 2, line 10, at end insert

'are included in a central register established under Schedule [Central Register of electors for referendums (Wales)] or who'.

No. 18, in page 2, line 11, leave out from 'at' to end of line 12 and insert

'a local government election in any electoral area in the United Kingdom'.

No. 239, in page 2, line 11, leave out from 'at' to 'in' in line 12 and insert 'a parliamentary election'.

No. 84, in page 2, line 11, leave out

'an election for a county council or county borough council'

and insert 'a general election'.

No. 217, in page 2, line 12, leave out 'Wales' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

No. 85, in page 2, line 12, at end insert

'and those citizens of the United Kingdom who would be entitled to vote in a general election in any electoral area of the United Kingdom, who were born in Wales.'.

No. 161, in page 2, line 12, at end insert

'except that citizens of the European Union who are not also British citizens shall not be entitled to vote.'.

No. 226, in page 2, line 12, at end insert

'who have been registered as local government electors on any Welsh local government register for the past five years or since they were 18, whichever be the shorter period'.

No. 237, in page 2, line 12, at end insert

'or have been entitled to vote as electors at a local government election in any electoral area in Wales in the previous twenty years'.

No. 139, in page 2, leave out lines 13 to 25.

No. 218, in page 2, line 14, leave out 'Wales' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

No. 21, in page 2, line 16, leave out

'county or county borough in Wales'

and insert

'local government area in the United Kingdom'.

No. 165, in page 2, line 16, leave out 'county or county borough' and insert 'parliamentary constituency'.

No. 219, in page 2, line 16, leave out 'Wales' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

No. 164, in page 2, line 16, at end insert

'and shall himself act as Counting Officer for electors registered in the central register established under Schedule [Central Register of electors for referendums (Wales)] and shall also set up and maintain that register.'.

No. 25, in page 2, line 26, leave out 'Wales' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

No. 28, in clause 3, page 2, line 40, leave out

'county or county borough in Wales'

and insert

'local government area in the United Kingdom'.

New clause 11—*Counting*—

'—(1) The Secretary of State shall appoint a Chief Counting Officer for the United Kingdom.

(2) The Chief Counting Officer shall appoint a Counting Officer for each local government area in the United Kingdom.

(3) Each Counting Officer shall—

(a) conduct the counting of votes in the area for which he is appointed in accordance with any directions given by the Chief Counting Officer, and

(b) certify the number of ballot papers counted by him and the number of votes cast for each proposition.

(4) The Chief Counting Officer shall certify the total of—

(a) the ballot papers counted, and

(b) the votes cast for each proposition

for the whole of the United Kingdom.'

Amendment No. 132, in schedule 1, page 4, line 2, leave out 'IN SCOTLAND'.

Amendment No. 34, in page 4, line 5, leave out 'Scotland' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

Amendment No. 35, in page 4, line 15, leave out 'Scotland' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

Amendment No. 133, in schedule 2, page 5, line 2, leave out 'IN WALES'.

Amendment No. 36, in page 5, line 3, leave out 'Wales' and insert 'the United Kingdom'.

New schedule 2—*Central register of electors for referendums (Scotland)*—

A central register of electors shall be set up and maintained for electors only eligible to vote in the referendums. It shall be open to any person in the following categories to be included in that register up to thirty days before the date of any referendum.

Such persons may vote by post, by proxy or in person at polling stations provided specifically for the purpose in such centres as the counting officers deem necessary. Persons eligible to be included on the central register are:

(i) persons who are resident in England, Wales or Northern Ireland but who could claim a vote in Scotland by reason of their previous residence there were they living outside the United Kingdom under the provisions of the Representation of the People Acts;

(ii) persons who, under the provisions of the Immigration Acts could claim British citizenship by descent where that claim derives from a father or mother whose place of birth, naturalisation or residence is in Scotland;

(iii) persons born in Scotland but living elsewhere in the United Kingdom;

(iv) persons not born in Scotland but who have lived in Scotland for more than ten years and now live elsewhere in the United Kingdom and who sign an affidavit that it is their firm intention to return to Scotland to live permanently;

(v) persons owning residential property in Scotland but not being on a local government electoral register who sign an affidavit that it is their firm intention to return to Scotland to live permanently.'.

New schedule 3—*Central register of electors for referendums (Wales)*—

A central register of electors shall be set up and maintained for electors only eligible to vote in the referendums. It shall be open to any person in the following categories to be included in that register up to thirty days before the date of any referendum.

Such persons may vote by post, by proxy or in person at polling stations provided specifically for the purpose in such centres as the counting officers deem necessary. Persons eligible to be included on the central register are:

(i) persons who are resident in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland but who could claim a vote in Wales by reason of their previous residence there were they living outside the United Kingdom under the provisions of the Representation of the People Acts;

(ii) persons who, under the provisions of the Immigration Acts could claim British citizenship by descent where that claim derives from a father or mother whose place of birth, naturalisation or residence is in Wales;

(iii) persons born in Wales but living elsewhere in the United Kingdom;

(iv) persons not born in Wales but who have lived in Wales for more than ten years and now live elsewhere in the United Kingdom and who sign an affidavit that it is their firm intention to return to Wales to live permanently;

(v) persons owning residential property in Wales but not being on a local government electoral register who sign an affidavit that it is their firm intention to return to Wales to live permanently.'.

Amendment No. 37, in title, line 1, leave out 'in Scotland'.

Amendment No. 38, in line 3, leave out 'in Wales'.

Mr. Cash: We are debating a first-class but a third-rate constitutional Bill which is being treated in an unprecedented manner; and we have been debating not so much a guillotine motion as a lethal injection.

The Leader of the House said that it was not a constitutional Bill—a statement which should in itself disqualify her from that office. The Bill is a constitutional Bill—a major constitutional Bill. Moreover, it includes tax-varying powers that go to the very heart of the sovereignty and integrity of Parliament. As hon. Members

[Mr. Cash]

have already said, debate on previous constitutional Bills has lasted for as long as 30 days, whereas we will be given as few as one or two days to debate this measure.

We are debating a Bill which has been conceived in a cuckoo's nest of a Cabinet that is controlled by a Scots cabal of Ministers of the Crown, representing the biggest takeover of the United Kingdom since the Union, in 1603, of the Crowns of Scotland and England. A quarter of all Ministers are Scots—19 of the 89 Ministers are Scots. I mentioned a Scots cabal, and I should explain that I define "cabal" as something representing conceit, arrogance, bombast, aggression and lies.

The plain fact is that the Bill represents the views that were expressed by the Prime Minister in the general election campaign and in the Labour party manifesto. However, his euphoria will be dashed—as was that of the Stuarts, in 1649, when Charles I lost his head because of his folly and his arrogance. It is worth remembering that, in its title, the Bill is a successor to the 1979 devolution legislation, which led to the fall of the Callaghan Government. It has been well said that, eventually, they shall reap as they have sown.

The Bill is a part of a policy that is inside out and upside down, with principles on the outside and precedents on the downside. It is an outrage that the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill precedes the White Paper and the devolution Bill itself, and it is a deceit to say that it stands on its own. Even in 1975, Harold Wilson insisted on a White Paper before introducing legislation on a European referendum.

As I said to the Secretary of State for Scotland—although my remarks apply to Wales as much as to Scotland—on Second Reading, the Bill necessarily involves not so much the West Lothian question as the United Kingdom question.

Referendums should not be confined to Scotland and Wales; they should encompass the United Kingdom as a whole. Given the Bill's tax-varying proposals, the electors of my constituency and all those of the United Kingdom, including those of England and Northern Ireland, are involved. That will be the case whether taxes are increased, decreased or varied. The Government promised that any tax-varying powers would be defined and limited, but that is not what the Bill or, indeed, the question on the ballot paper says. The question on the ballot paper is therefore a cruel fraud perpetrated on the voters.

7 pm

A further point of great concern to many Opposition Members relates to the United Kingdom. Our manifesto and all the utterances of the former Prime Minister put the issue of the Union, let alone the European Union, at the very heart of our campaign. I cannot understand why the shadow Cabinet has not decided to have a formal Whip on my amendment to clause 1, which would extend the referendum franchise to the electorate of the United Kingdom as a whole. That would be entirely consistent with our manifesto and the policy of the former Prime Minister, now the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): If it is now the official policy of the hon. Gentleman's party that the franchise should be extended to the electorate of the UK as a whole, is it also its policy that any settlement in Northern Ireland would be submitted to a referendum of the UK as a whole?

Mr. Cash: Speaking as a Back Bencher, there is every reason why any referendum involving the dismembering of the United Kingdom should be referred to the United Kingdom as a whole. That has the merit of logic and common sense. I leave hon. Members to draw their own conclusions, but with the encouraging proviso that Back Benchers are free to vote, according to the Whips, for my amendment if they so wish.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): In 1979, did the Conservative party take the same stance and say that the referendum should have involved the UK as a whole?

Mr. Cash: I am delighted to be able to say that we are always making progress. I must add that the impact of a Bill of this importance, with its tax-varying powers, puts it in the category of the first constitutional status which I would regard as not dissimilar to the European referendum of 1975, which was dealt with by the electorate of the United Kingdom as a whole. Hon. Members should consider these important points affecting the United Kingdom question.

As I said, in 1975 there was a clear recognition that what was then the Referendum Bill, which was of similar importance to the internal domestic interests of the United Kingdom as this Bill is now, affected the United Kingdom as a whole. There was a national counting procedure because many Scots live and work in parts of the United Kingdom other than Scotland. There are those who live in Scotland who qualify for a vote but who come from other parts of the world. The Bill is riddled with inconsistencies, injustice and contradictions.

Why, but for the draconian discipline imposed by the Prime Minister on his Members of Parliament, is there no resistance among Labour Members from the north-east and north-west as there was in 1977 and 1979 and who, under the terms of the Bill, will be profoundly damaged by the establishment of a Scottish Parliament with tax-varying powers? It would, in any event, damage the rest of the United Kingdom, and Scottish Members of Parliament would lose most of their moral authority in the Westminster Parliament.

There are at present 72 Scottish Members of Parliament. Some 30 years ago, the Kilbrandon commission on the constitution recommended that the number should be reduced and, indeed, one of my amendments proposes that it should be reduced to 45, which is, appropriately, the same number as when the Act of Union 1706 was passed. Furthermore, the Bill leaves in limbo the role of the Secretary of State for Scotland, which, given his remarks today, is no doubt what he deserves. It is essential that it is clearly reaffirmed, just as the sovereignty of the United Kingdom should also be reaffirmed in the Bill.

I noticed the Secretary of State for Wales making light of the fact that amendments had been tabled to preserve the Crown and the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. Anyone who thinks that the Bill does not go to the heart of the future of the United Kingdom should not be sitting in this House as a Minister. We should repudiate any

possibility of the Bill being a trojan horse for reducing the component parts of the United Kingdom to provinces within the European Union and reaffirm the direct accountability, whether in Scotland or Wales, of Ministers of the Crown exclusively to the United Kingdom Parliament. These matters are all part and parcel of the United Kingdom question.

It is inconceivable that we can proceed with a Bill of this kind when it contains arrangements that are so vague that it is impossible for us to know what the role of the Secretary of State would be and the extent to which Ministers of the Crown would be responsible to this Parliament. Would they be responsible to a Scottish Parliament? What would be those Ministers' functions? The Bill leaves so many questions unanswered and puts the House in an impossible situation.

The amendments propose a solution to the problems that I have outlined and, indeed, to the West Lothian question. There is an answer to it, although it may not be very congenial to Scottish Members. I suggest that when matters arise in this Parliament that affect only those parts of the UK other than Scotland, Scottish Members of Parliament shall, by Standing Orders of the United Kingdom Parliament, speak but not vote.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): That is highly unrealistic. The hon. Gentleman must know that the Treasury has a relationship with spending Departments. One can imagine what would happen if the spending Departments were in the hands of one party and the Treasury in the hands of another—it is absolutely unreal.

Mr. Cash: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but that is not the case, and for this very good reason. The West Lothian question, which is often attributed to him, but which, as he has generously acknowledged, was posed by Mr. Enoch Powell, goes to the very heart of the dismembering of the United Kingdom and, as the hon. Gentleman has pointed out repeatedly in his distinguished career, presents the House with the impossible contradictions inherent in the present situation. If the Bill proceeds, and if the hon. Gentleman and other members of his party do not carry forward their opposition to this Bill and the devolution Bill as they did before, we shall face not only the dismembering of the United Kingdom but the question that he has just put to me—and we are going to have to resolve it. It is not enough to say that it is unreal. The situation is real because it has arisen. It has been presented by the Government, not the Opposition.

Let me put it another way: how would Scottish and Welsh Members react—or, more to the point, how would Scottish and Welsh citizens react—if we set up an exclusively English Parliament but with a full complement of English Members who would continue to vote on Scottish and Welsh matters? That is the obverse of what the Bill is dealing with.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): May I point out to the hon. Gentleman that, particularly over the past 18 years, when Parliament was dominated by his party, legislation designated solely for Scotland was voted in by English Members, not by Members from the Scottish National party, the Liberal Democrats or the Labour party, which were the dominant parties in Scotland? His argument is illogical because legislation was imposed by him and his colleagues.

Mr. Cash: I take it that the hon. Lady is not suggesting that they had no opportunity to speak or vote. They may have been outvoted—

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman said speak and not vote.

Mr. Cash: I said speak and not vote in the new circumstances. My answer to the West Lothian question, which I pose as the United Kingdom question, is that after the creation of a Scottish Parliament, it would be reasonable for us to propose changing our Standing Orders so that Scottish Members would be entitled to speak and not vote in the circumstances that I have described.

Mrs. Ewing: No problem.

Mr. Cash: I am delighted that the hon. Lady says that that is no problem, because it helps to relieve some of the difficulties inherent in the question posed so diligently in the past by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I am certain that the Scottish and Welsh people would not want the situation to continue if we held pole position in the United Kingdom Parliament and they were constantly affected by our decisions.

Refurbishment has not been mentioned so far. The issue is tucked away in a subtle and devious fashion in one of the last clauses in this wretched Bill. It says that we in this Parliament are expected to pay for the refurbishment of the buildings to be set up for the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament, even before the passage of the Bill on devolution or the publication of the White Paper—which definitely should precede that Bill, with the referendum coming afterwards. That is outrageous. It is equally disgraceful that we are not being allowed to debate this Bill properly, but the discussion on that has now taken place.

As I have said, within the past 30 years, the Kilbrandon commission suggested that Scotland should have fewer Members. We should also give proper consideration to the threshold for the majority if there is to be an effective referendum. I dare say that other hon. Members will want to refer to that, so I shall not enlarge on it. I simply point out in conclusion that I have suggested a figure of one third in my amendments because I should like to know the Foreign Secretary's reaction, given that he proposed that in 1978–79. I should be happy with a threshold of 50 or 60 per cent., but as we are dealing with a Labour Government with a vast majority—

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for displaying his characteristic courtesy in giving way. Given the probability of the Bill becoming an Act, does he intend to campaign actively in the referendum campaigns? If so, where will he devote his energies—in Scotland or in Wales?

Mr. Cash: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that interesting question. I shall certainly campaign. I shall be in England, but I am near enough to Wales to be able to go there from time to time.

[Mr. Cash]

The Bill is an outrage. It has been introduced outrageously and should be rejected, but I should like as many hon. Members as possible to consider my amendments and vote for them.

Mr. Dalyell: Because of the time constraints, I should like to ask just one succinct but practical and urgent question that goes back to an issue raised by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) in the previous debate. It is particularly relevant to the forces vote, but also to other bona fide Scots working in Europe or in England.

7.15 pm

During the recess, I had the privilege of being asked by my national service regiment, the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, to spend time with them on their operational duties in Bosnia. I can put the problem best by asking the same question that I was asked there. The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards are based at Fallingbostel in Germany, but many of them are registered at Catterick, Winchester or other military bases. Many of them regard themselves as fully fledged Scots, just as Scottish as any Scottish Members of Parliament. They asked, "Are we going to have our say in the referendum?" What is the Government's thinking on that?

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): As usual, the hon. Gentleman has asked a difficult question. I am glad that he has asked it of his Front Bench rather than us.

I have a simple point to make. It is beyond dispute that the creation of a Parliament in Scotland and an Assembly in Wales is of interest to the entire United Kingdom, affecting the whole country. The United Kingdom is a unique constitutional entity, created from four parts, bound together by a single sovereign Parliament. Combined with our unwritten constitution, that has created an unusual entity that, nevertheless, works well in practice.

Anything that threatens to alter one part of the Union is of concern to all. That was recognised at the creation of the Union. Two separate sovereign Parliaments came together in 1707 to create a new Parliament for Great Britain, which was itself a new constitutional entity. It follows that any measure that affects that constitutional entity, such as the creation of a new Scottish Parliament, is a matter for all the citizens of Great Britain, now joined by Northern Ireland.

Annual Government expenditure in Scotland is over £800 per head greater than the figure for the whole United Kingdom. In Wales, the gap between what is raised locally in taxation and what is spent there by the Government is even larger. Both Scotland and Wales have a large fiscal deficit. That is a matter of considerable controversy. My constituency looks over the Bristol channel to Wales. Many of the grants and subsidies that Wales gets transfer jobs from my side of the Bristol channel to Wales. The matter is controversial, but it is a price that many English people feel is worth paying for a successful Union.

Mr. Dalyell: Can the right hon. Gentleman clarify exactly what he is referring to? Is he referring to identifiable public expenditure per capita? What is the £800 figure?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the annual publications produced by the Scottish Office and the Welsh Office. One is called "Government Expenditure and Revenues in Scotland", the other "Government Expenditure and Revenues in Wales". The most recent figures I have are for 1994–95. From those publications I get a figure per head in Scotland of £839 more than for the United Kingdom as a whole. For Wales, the figure is less, but the other side of the equation—the revenue side—is much less, so the fiscal gap between revenue and expenditure is even wider for Wales than it is for Scotland. There is absolutely no doubt about it. From the figures available to all hon. Members, it is clear that both countries run large fiscal deficits which are made up by subsidies chiefly from the English taxpayer.

I personally am willing to accept some of that deficit as a price worth paying for a successful Union. What I do not accept is that, in addition to the large fiscal transfers, it is now proposed that there should be a Parliament for Scotland and an Assembly for Wales which will, of course, be used to attract even more money, powers and privileges to those parts of the United Kingdom at the expense of the English counties.

The Bill provides a small but significant example of what I am talking about. Let us look at who will pay for the costs of the referendum and for the preparatory work involved in setting up the Parliament in Scotland and the Assembly in Wales. Clause 5 makes it clear that the money will come from the Consolidated Fund. In other words, it is overwhelmingly—again—the English taxpayer who will pay for all of this while having no say at all in the outcome and no vote in the proposed referendums.

I will take another well-known example—the over-representation of Scotland and Wales in this House compared with what those two parts of the United Kingdom would be entitled to on a strictly pro rata population basis. I accept that there is a case for allowing the extremities of any country some over-representation to make allowances for the sparsity of population and for the difficulties of communication and travel, but that does not apply to the very small constituencies in cities such as Glasgow and Edinburgh.

If the proposals go through and if the referendums proceed as planned by the Government, in addition to that over-representation, Scotland and Wales will have their own Parliament and Assembly. The extra Westminster Members will continue to come to this Parliament. They will have nothing to do in their own constituencies because all the powers that they presently have over matters such as health and education will have been transferred to the local Parliament and the local Assembly. They will, however, apparently continue to come to this Parliament in the same numbers in order to interfere in matters that apply to England, and to my constituents in particular.

The two examples I have given—the subsidies that flow to Wales and Scotland and the parliamentary over-representation—make one simple point.

The referendums and their outcome are not matters simply for Scotland and Wales; they are of crucial interest and importance for the entire United Kingdom. I support amendment No. 2 because it would insist that the questions posed in the proposed referendums should be available to all the citizens of the United Kingdom and not simply those in Scotland and Wales.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that the speeches we are hearing from Conservative Members are basically anti-Scottish. All the talk of Scotland being over-represented, of fiscal transfers and of the English taxpayer paying for the services provided for the people of Scotland is, frankly, racist. The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) introduced the debate in an offensive manner. It is offensive to have the ability of Cabinet members questioned on the basis of their ethnic origin. If the hon. Gentleman does not find that offensive, he should not be in this place, which is meant to be the mother of Parliaments and the home of democracy. There would have been demonstrations in the streets against such racist talk from any Member of Parliament in the 1930s. It is a disgrace and the hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself.

Some hon. Members have spoken of the extension of the franchise to the rest of the United Kingdom, which is covered by this group of amendments. Most of the United Kingdom is already included in the franchise; everyone in Scotland and Wales will get the vote. During the general election, the English knew very well that that would be the case. The hon. Member for Stone said that in the general election, the Conservative party put preservation of the Union at the very heart of its campaign. I remind him not only that the Conservatives were wiped out in Scotland and in Wales, but that they did not do very well in England either. Some 61 per cent. of English voters voted for either the Labour party or for the Liberal Democrats, both of which made it clear that referendums would be held only in Scotland and in Wales. We have a mandate from the English people and we speak for the English people, unlike Conservative Members who try to build a case on that basis.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): On the basis of the argument that the hon. Gentleman appears to be putting forward at the moment, I assume that he would not expect any Labour Government supported by Members of Parliament from Scotland, England or Wales to have any say on matters affecting Northern Ireland.

Mr. McAllion: I never interfere in Northern Ireland's affairs; I have learnt that it is wise not to do that. I suggest that hon. Members who do not know much about Northern Ireland should not raise the matter of Northern Ireland casually. There is a very sensitive situation there and we should not blunder into it or make false analogies. It is typical, however, of Conservative Members to do that.

The proposals that will be in the White Paper, and then in the Bills that introduce the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, will change the government of Scotland and of Wales. They will not change the government of England. As far as I know, England will continue to be governed as it has always been governed—by this place. I look forward to the day when the English come to their senses and say that it is time that they had an English Parliament. Many Conservative Members continually assume that this is an English Parliament with wee bits of Scotland and Wales added on. We are a big inconvenience. We cause debates, we cause trouble and we take taxpayers' money. That is the tenor of debate from Tory Members.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I am confused about why the hon. Gentleman supports the Bill as he resigned from the Labour Front Bench when it was announced in London that the Scottish Labour party would have to put up with the idea of a referendum. Why does he now support the Bill?

Mr. McAllion: It is quite simple. The Scottish Labour party subsequently endorsed the decision to hold a referendum and the Scottish voters then endorsed that decision at the general election. As a good democrat, I recognise when I am beaten and I accept that decision. I wish that Conservative Members would recognise when they are beaten in Scotland and that they would accept that there will be a Scottish Parliament because the Scottish people want one.

Amendment No. 120 causes me some concern. It deals with people who were born in Scotland but no longer live there, and suggests that they should be allowed to take part in the referendum. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has, as usual, come up with a very appropriate name for it: he calls it the Gary McAllister-Paul Lambert amendment. For Conservative Members from England who do not recognise those names, they are Scottish internationals. One plays in Leeds, other in Dortmund. They have made their choice to leave Scotland and to seek fame and fortune elsewhere. They earn big money for living outside Scotland. If that is their decision, one of the penalties they have to pay is that they cannot vote in elections in Scotland. That is an important distinction. Whoever you are, if you choose to leave your country, you choose to leave the democracy in that country.

7.30 pm

I am worried about the ethnic nature of some of the amendments, as if where someone was born, or where their father and grandfather come from, qualified them for the franchise. We have only one franchise in Scotland—if someone lives in Scotland, they have the franchise no matter what their ethnic origin or which country they came from. That is the only franchise we recognise. The speech by one hon. Gentleman earlier caused me great concern. He was very passionate—I do not know his constituency so I cannot refer to him—and he had an almost mystical faith in the Union, which we frequently hear from Opposition Members. He used words and phrases such as consanguinity, marriage and the blood that ties us together. He stopped short of saying kith and kin, but that is what he meant. That is the language that the Tories used to use about the empire and the other parts of the world that England used to control. The Tories still think in those terms about Scotland and Wales, but those days are over. The fact that they have not recognised that those days are over is why they were wiped out electorally in Scotland and Wales. Democracy is changing. Power has been decentralised and the Bill is part of that process. It will strengthen the links between Scotland and England, not worsen them.

[Mr. McAllion]

Amendment No. 120 would extend the franchise to those whose grandparents were born in Scotland. On a similar basis, I could take part in the election in the Republic of Ireland next Sunday because my grandparents were Irish. That shows what nonsense the suggestion is. I should not take part in an election in another country that has nothing to do with me now.

Mr. Garnier: Does the hon. Gentleman understand that, under the Irish constitution, he would not be allowed to take part in next Sunday's election?

Mr. McAllion: I have just said that. I said that if the amendment applied in the Republic of Ireland, I would be able to take part. It is right that I should not be allowed to take part in the election; and nobody who lives in America, Germany, France or anywhere else in the world who has a grandfather or grandmother who happened to be born in Scotland should be allowed to take part in the referendum. That is not a qualification for the franchise.

A later amendment—I think it is amendment No. 149—would exclude citizens of the European Union from the referendum. Under amendment No. 120, a Scot who lives in the Republic of Ireland could take part in the referendum, but under amendment No. 149 he would be disqualified as a citizen of a member country of the European Union. That is nonsense.

As for the Tories' threshold argument, the only reason to introduce thresholds into a referendum is to ensure that the referendum does not succeed. That is what happened in 1978. The people who introduced and supported the threshold did not want a Scottish Assembly. That was the last throw of the dice to stop it happening; it was not about democracy but about blocking the creation of a Scottish Parliament—and it is the same today.

Mr. Cash: What about the Foreign Secretary?

Mr. McAllion: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was a very bad man in 1978, as was my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow. I have no truck with their position then. I opposed them then and if they did it again I would oppose them again. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has learned his lesson. He was wrong in 1978 and we in Scotland have paid a heavy price because we did not have a Parliament in the past 18 years to protect us from the policies of the hon. Member for Stone and his colleagues. Do not tell me that any Tory is interested in democracy in Scotland or in the Scottish people. The Tories rammed the poll tax down the throats of the Scottish people a whole year before they introduced it in any other part of the United Kingdom. There was no referendum then. Nobody asked whether the Scottish voters should be given the franchise.

The Tories reorganised local government in Scotland. People in Dundee are still suffering because of the butchery of Scottish local government by the last Tory Government. There was no referendum on that. Local authorities in Scotland had to organise a referendum to stop water privatisation, like that in England and Wales, happening in Scotland. The Labour local authorities organised that referendum, not the Tory Government. We are not fooled by Opposition Members who say that they are worried about parliamentary democracy or the sovereignty of the people. They worry only about their skins and about power being devolved across the United Kingdom. A different political structure will make them into what they really are—a bunch of dinosaurs.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I wish to address the arguments put forward by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) in support of amendment No. 2. I am surprised that he, a member of a party that used to be called a unionist party, should favour a measure that would sow, if it were carried, the seeds of great disunity in the United Kingdom. If I understand amendment No. 2 aright, it would extend the referendum to England.

Mr. Cash: To the United Kingdom.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I wish the hon. Gentleman would stop making comments from a seated position. He should know better.

Mr. Maclennan: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has worked it out, but if the referendum were to be held throughout the United Kingdom and a different result were marked up in England—I say that advisedly—from that registered in Scotland, he would have created a revolutionary situation. He would certainly do so if he sought to translate such a result into a justification for the failure of the Parliament of the United Kingdom to implement the clear and settled will of the Scottish people to have a Parliament.

The argument of the hon. Member for Stone has a second leg. He is not satisfied that the House of Commons can adequately determine the issues that would flow from a positive vote in the referendum. As the hon. Gentleman belongs to a party that is never slow to emphasise the sovereignty of Parliament—a view that distinguishes it from my party, because we believe that sovereignty rests with the people—it is strange that he should think that Parliament is not capable of deciding the issue. Of course, the outcome of a referendum in Scotland will have an impact on the United Kingdom as a whole. Our fates are linked and our constitutional arrangements should take account of a decision to establish a Scottish Parliament. Clearly, some of the questions that have been raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) must be addressed at some point.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): That is the nub of the question. At what point will the anxieties of, or the knock-on effects on, the people in England be addressed? According to the way in which the proposals have been made, those anxieties and effects will be brushed under the carpet and ignored. Those of us who believe in the Union and want it to survive are concerned that devolution will lead to an explosive situation. We want to prevent that. Those issues should be addressed now, in this debate—if not on the amendments before us, then on some others.

Mr. Maclennan: Those issues have been addressed and have been in order; otherwise the amendments to which the arguments were tied would not have been selected. They have not been ruled out of order and I do

not suppose that they will be. The question is what weight they should be given, not whether they are in order. I submit that we should not attach great weight to those arguments now in determining whether to establish the machinery to hold a referendum to put beyond peradventure the view of the Scottish people on whether they want a Scottish Parliament along lines that will be set out in a White Paper to be published before the House rises for the summer recess. It seems that that is a relatively limited question.

When substantive legislation implementing the will of the Scottish people as expressed in a referendum is brought forward, I grant that there will come a time for considering whether it is right that the House of Commons should remain constituted as it is and whether Scottish membership of the House should in some way be reduced, and by how much. It would also be right to consider whether the Scots would have not only the right to speak, but to vote not only on United Kingdom matters but on matters affecting parts of England for which they do not have direct responsibility or responsibilities which are discharged, as far as Scotland is concerned, in the new Scottish Parliament.

All such matters are certainly appropriate for debate and certainly ought to be debated, but I question their relevance to the Bill. I question whether it makes sense to invite the English—again, I say that advisedly—or those living in Northern Ireland to contribute their views on whether the Scots have a settled mind on wishing to have a Scottish Parliament.

I do not doubt that the English and those living in Northern Ireland have views, but my guess is that, if the English were consulted separately in, as it were, a separate constituency, they would most likely agree that, if the Scots wanted a Parliament, they should have it. There is quite a lot of anecdotal evidence that Conservative Members of Parliament who have addressed meetings in England on this subject have encountered that answer from English audiences. I do not think that that need delay us.

Mr. Dalyell: Who does the hon. Gentleman think ought to pay for the Scottish Parliament—the Scots alone or the United Kingdom taxpayer?

Mr. Maclennan: That is an interesting question, which I will be happy to discuss when we consider the system and the scheme, either in the debate on the White Paper or the debate on the substantive legislation. I do not, however, believe that it is in the least germane to the issue before us.

My party is by no means in favour of the referendum, but the facts are clear. The referendum is a Government commitment. They put it before the Scottish people and had it underwritten and endorsed, and it is simply unreal not to recognise that. The question that we must ask ourselves is whether we are right in assuming that the mind of the Scottish people is settled. The referendum will give us the chance to put that question beyond any further argument. The issue is quite simple, and most of the amendments are a distraction from the central question about machinery and enabling us to put the question quite beyond doubt, which is at the heart of the Bill.

I understand the arguments for holding referendums in other ways. I remember the debates that we had in 1978 about post-legislative referendums. All those matters will no doubt be discussed again in future, but tonight we have a relatively simple question before us. I do not think that in opposing amendments such as that tabled by the hon. Member for Stone, extending the question to other members of the United Kingdom, we are in any way denying that what would be done in Scotland would have its impact on others in the United Kingdom—of course it would. People had an opportunity to register that fact in a general election, and overwhelmingly supported parties that were committed to the course that the Government are now following. No doubt they will have further opportunities to express their views.

Let the hon. Member for Stone and his hon. Friends recognise that they lost the argument. Let them recognise that they will have a further opportunity to return to the issues at the right time. They will be listened to with respect in so far as they are not seeking to destroy the wish of the Scottish people.

7.45 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I shall speak specifically to amendments Nos. 120 and 121, which are in my name. I should make it clear to my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) that, if he wishes to test the opinion of the Committee on the wider issue of the United Kingdom franchise, I shall certainly be in the Lobby with him. It is, however, the nature of the grouping of the amendments that if that first and more sensible amendment to leave out "Scotland" and insert "United Kingdom" were to fall, we would then be driven to consider a more narrow extension of franchise along the lines proposed in amendments Nos. 120 and 121.

Amendment No. 120 deals with what the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has christened the Gary McAllister question. I would prefer to call it the Rob Wainwright question. I find it hard to understand why someone who is able to play rugby for Scotland should not be able to vote in a referendum on Scotland's future. The amendment therefore extends the franchise, should it not be extended to the whole of the UK, to those Scots who are not currently resident in Scotland.

There is a precedent, and it was considered by the previous Labour Government during the passage of the Referendum Bill authorising a referendum on the European Community. Lord Glenamara, then Lord President of the Council, suggested a number of conditions on which franchise might be extended. They were not being on the electoral register, having the right of abode, having resided at some time in the United Kingdom—in this case that would be in Scotland—being in occupation, service or employment abroad—not simply having retired to live elsewhere but being occupied or serving Scotland or the United Kingdom abroad—and having declared some intention to return, which was what he called

"a vital assurance of continuing connection with this country".—[*Official Report*, 22 April 1975; Vol. 890, c. 1344.]

In the end, the scheme was not proceeded with, although Lord Glenamara made it clear to the House that it would be so possible to extend the franchise.

I hope that the Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution will address himself to the concern expressed in amendment No. 120. A great number of Scots—some

[Mr. Michael Fallon]

of them indeed serving the state—will not be able to vote in the referendum, yet it would be perfectly possible, were the Government so minded, to allow them to do so.

Mr. Wallace: On the basis of the link between taxation and representation, does the hon. Gentleman accept that, in the event of a Scottish Parliament having tax-varying powers, such people should also be subject to tax? Does not that underline the huge anomaly and nonsense of what he is proposing?

Mr. Fallon: No, it does not, because the referendum is a one-off decision. We have been told that constantly. It is a constitutional decision, setting up quite different constitutional arrangements. That is indeed why a referendum is proposed to decide it.

Mr. Dalyell: Lord Glenamara—Ted Short as he then was—who was the most candid and straightforward of men, really did believe that it was practical and sensible to extend the franchise.

Mr. Fallon: That is what the *Hansard* reports of the relevant debates make clear. It was perfectly practical and sensible and, even though time was short, the Government of the day actively considered it. Why should Scots living outside Scotland be disenfranchised on this major constitutional issue?

Amendment No. 121 deals with service men serving abroad. I believe that it, too, has the support of the hon. Member for Linlithgow. The Government in 1975 acted on the issue and introduced a special clause specifically allowing those service men who were not on the electoral register to vote in the European referendum. They accepted the argument because service men at that point in the year—the spring of 1975—could not have known the previous October that a referendum was to be held, since the proposal was not made until January 1975.

The same argument applies today. Those who might well have wished to make special arrangements to register their vote would have done so had they known last October that this special constitutional vote was coming up. The Government have always recognised that special arrangements need to be made for the service vote, and I do not see why it is not possible to make such arrangements in this case. There are many service men who would otherwise, perhaps, be stationed in Scotland and be able to vote there, but who are serving their country at very short notice in far-flung places. Their service should be recognised with some special arrangement.

Sir Robert Smith: The register that would be used for a referendum is the one that was compiled from a census last October, and people deciding whether to register then would have been deciding whether to enfranchise themselves for the United Kingdom general election. Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that people who had chosen not to register for that general election would be missing out on the referendum vote?

Mr. Fallon: What I am suggesting to the Committee is that people could not have known last October that they had to be on the register then to qualify for a referendum that they did not know would be conducted this September. That is the point. It is only fair, particularly for service men, that we recognise that point, and I ask the Government, even at this late stage, to think again about how Scottish service men are able to vote in the referendum.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): I assure the Committee that amendments Nos. 83 to 85 are serious amendments intended to address the anomaly identified by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) in his interventions earlier in the debate. Amendments Nos. 82 and 83 relate to the enfranchisement of Scots living outside Scotland, and amendments Nos. 84 and 85 relate to Welsh men and women living outside Wales.

The amendments are, in a way, slimmed-down versions of new schedule 2, which was tabled by my Front-Bench colleagues, and of amendment No. 120, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) and others. They represent a serious attempt to solve a serious problem that has been brought to my attention by Scots men and women in my constituency who want to be able to vote in the referendum.

I am disappointed by the tone of the remarks of the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), who introduced an unnecessarily confrontational note into a debate on a serious problem that is of concern to Scots men and women living outside their native country.

The problem is complex, and yet rather simple. The Government of the day used the general election register in the 1978 referendums, but the present Government intend to use the local government register this time, thus allowing temporary European Union residents, including English men and women living in Scotland or Wales, the right to vote in referendums on the future of those countries, but denies a vote to Scots and Welsh people, temporarily absent from their countries—whether just across the border in England, or overseas serving their country in whatever capacity—who would be able to register as overseas voters for a general election.

I want not to attack the Scots, as the hon. Member for Dundee, East suggested that Conservative Members were seeking to do, but to defend the rights of Scots men and women living in my constituency. The *Worcester Evening News*, perhaps a trifle flippantly, summarised the situation as the Government intending to give a Greek waiter temporarily working in a backstreet cafe in Edinburgh the right to vote in an election about Scotland's future, but denying it to a Scottish journalist working here in Westminster for *The Scotsman*. That is an extreme version of a real anomaly.

Mr. Salmond: I am not sure which journalist from *The Scotsman* the hon. Gentleman has in mind, and whether he is absolutely convinced that that journalist does not have a residence in Scotland. Is he incapable of understanding why I, as leader of the Scottish National party, am perfectly comfortable with the idea of people from England, Wales, France, the rest of Europe, or Timbuktu, who are resident in Scotland and contribute to the community there, voting on the future of the country? Is he totally incapable of understanding why residents who contribute to a community should have rights of determination, regardless of where they are from?

Mr. Luff: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and I wish that we could have a serious debate on

the matter. It is a shame that the guillotine makes that difficult to do. There are two separate issues: whether we should give temporary residents in Scotland from other European countries the right to vote in the referendum; and whether we should give Scots people temporarily absent from their country that same right.

I think that the questions hang together and that there is an injustice in denying that right to a Scots person who is temporarily absent while granting it to a person who is there for only a short period and has no interest whatever in the long-term future of the country. That is my view, and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) disagrees, but the two questions are separate and should both be addressed at greater length than is the case in this scandalously truncated debate.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Why should the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram)—the Earl of Ancram—for example, have a vote on Scotland's future, when he deserted his native land to seek his fortune with the Tory party south of the border?

Mr. Luff: I will leave my right hon. Friend the Earl to speak for himself, and I am sure that he will do so most eloquently. I am concerned about the points raised by my constituents—Scots men and women, born in Scotland, most of whom intend to return to Scotland later in their lives—who feel that they are being denied their right to express a view about their birthright. I do not know how they would vote—for all I know, they could be the most ardent pro-devolutionists—but that is not the point. It is an outrage to deny them their birthright.

I find it surprising that Labour Members are laughing at that important point. They are laughing at Scots men and women who are seeking to exercise their right to have a say in their country's future. I find myself in the strange position, as an individual who opposes the legislation and the concept of devolution, at least on the basis proposed at present, of defending Scots people's rights in the face of the Government's hostility. I find that surprising. I am sorry that Labour Members are scoffing, because I intended to make a serious point and I would like a serious response.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the hon. Gentleman define what he means by temporary residents? I met the mother of an old friend, who was born in Glasgow in 1910 and moved to Oxford in 1936. If she now moved back, should she have the right to vote?

Mr. Luff: My experience of Scots men and women living outside their country, whether in England or elsewhere, is that they have a deep sentimental attachment to Scotland that is often more powerful, I am ashamed to say, than that of English men and women to England.

Mr. Wallace: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Luff: No. I want those on the Front Benches to have time to wind up, and I am taking too long over these remarks.

Why are the Government insisting on using the local government register? My suspicion is that they are seeking to exclude overseas visitors who are eligible to vote in parliamentary elections and will probably be able to vote in the elections for a Scottish Parliament. I do not understand why, and I urge the Government to think again about the rights and wrongs of that issue.

There is a strong test of residence in law. In 1970, in the Fox *v.* Stirk case, Lord Denning gave the following judgment:

"a person may properly be said to be 'resident' in a place when his stay there has a considerable degree of permanence".

I would say that the Scots men and women in Worcestershire who are temporarily absent from their homes, and Scots people working overseas for IBM, for the Government, or whatever, have a more "considerable degree of permanence" about their attachment to Scotland than the people whom the Government intend to enfranchise in the referendum.

I urge the Government to take the issue seriously. There is a real sense of grievance among Scots men and women—and, I suspect, among Welsh men and women, too—about the way in which the Government are approaching the measure. I plead with them not to deny Scots men and women their birthright to have a say in their country's future, when they are giving a say to people who have no interest in the future of Scotland.

It is a great shame that the Report stage will come so quickly after the Committee stage, because that will not give the Government time to table amendments to address the issue. However, I hope that they will do so in another place.

8 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I shall be brief. In response to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), I can say that we all agree that if the proposals are to proceed, they should do so on the basis of the consent, the "settled will", of the Scottish people. However, the tone of the hon. Gentleman's speech seemed to me to convey the message, "Let's just ask the question, and not confuse the voters with the facts." Unless we address all the questions and issues now, that is what will happen.

I have great sympathy with amendment No. 2, which was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), because it emphasises a simple point—that the Union of Scotland and England is a voluntary union of two parts. We would not expect one member of a club to be able unilaterally to change the rules of the club, to the detriment of the other members. Yet that is what is being proposed.

It is fine for Scotland to have its own Parliament, but it is quite another matter for Scotland to have its own Parliament while remaining a member of the United Kingdom. Moreover, the complexity of those arrangements are not dealt with by confining the franchise to the local government register.

It is a bit rich for the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) to call the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) a racist for raising what he calls the Gary McAllister question. There is also the converse of that question, which we might call the Terry Butcher question. The idea that an English football player playing for Glasgow Rangers would have a vote on the future of Scotland, although Gary McAllister would not—

Mr. McAllion: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jenkin: I shall not, because I want to be brief.

[Mr. Jenkin]

To describe those arguments as racist ill-becomes the debate, and may reflect more on the sentiments of the hon. Member for Dundee, East about the English than on anything else.

I wish to talk in particular about amendments Nos. 238 and 239, which I tabled, which propose to extend the franchise at least to the parliamentary rather than the local government register. I shall finish with a plea, to which I hope those on the Government Front Bench are listening.

My constituency surrounds Colchester, and living in that town are the Royal Scots, the finest and the oldest infantry regiment in the British Army—all Scots, to a man. The Royal Scots recently came down to Colchester from Fort George, and they have a deep loyalty to their country. Why can they not have a vote on the future of that country? Will the Minister confirm that his proposal means that those men will not have a vote on the future of the country for which they are prepared to fight and die? That makes nonsense of the Bill.

Mr. Garnier: I shall be extremely brief, and speak only to my amendments Nos. 140 and 141, which relate to clause 1, subsections (2) and (3), and deal with the franchise. I want the Bill to be changed so as to read:

"Those entitled to vote in the referendum shall be those United Kingdom citizens who, on the date of the referendum, would be entitled to vote as electors at a local government election in any electoral area in Scotland."

That makes a slightly narrower point than that made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon). I seek to draw to the attention of the Committee the fact that the Bill would allow European Union citizens to vote in Scotland and Wales, while not allowing equal rights to the other interested citizens throughout the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, the arrangements in the Bill conflict with what appears to be the law in other European Union countries. We do not have equivalent rights in other European countries. For example, under the Irish constitution, only citizens of Ireland can vote in referendums in Ireland. In France, only French citizens, and in Denmark, only Danish citizens, can vote in referendums under the constitutions of those countries. The same applies in Sweden, Spain, Norway and Italy, and there is an equivalent procedure in Belgium.

Why on earth are we allowing European Union citizens to vote in Scotland and Wales on the future of the United Kingdom, when the other European countries do not allow us the same rights in their referendums on constitutional matters? That seems wholly illogical.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): The amendments deal with one of the most serious flaws in the Bill—the arbitrary restrictions and limitations on the franchise. I think that it is common ground that the question that needs to be addressed with regard to the referendum is how it is properly and effectively to establish, in the late John Smith's phrase, the "settled will" of the Scottish people and the Welsh people?

We therefore need answers from the Minister to the many questions that have been asked about the arbitrary definitions proposed in the Bill. Earlier today, we started with the question asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—the Gary McAllister question. That is a serious question, which cannot be brushed aside by some of the rather contemptuous observations that have been made by Labour and Liberal Democrat Members.

Indeed, that question has been reinforced by some of my hon. Friends, such as my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), who said that it was the reverse side of the Terry Butcher question. Behind it lies the real difficulty encountered by those who happen temporarily to be resident elsewhere in the United Kingdom, who are to be given no voice on a matter that touches not only on the government of Scotland and Wales but on the administration of the whole of the United Kingdom.

When the Secretary of State for Scotland moved Second Reading—he was here a moment ago and he may return—he treated the House to a little joke about peppery Scotsmen in Kuala Lumpur who still take an interest in the old country. I do not share his hilarity. Scotland and Wales have never been inward-looking nations, and the world has been enriched by the talent and energy of Scotsmen who have carried their work abroad. The Secretary of State may find them figures of fun, but I think that most of his constituents would take considerable pride in those people's achievements.

The amendments that we are discussing concern not peppery old chaps in Kuala Lumpur, however, but the rights of Scots and Welsh men and women living and working in our own country. The epitome of that point was put by my hon. Friends the Members for Sevenoaks and for North Essex, and it was set out clearly in amendment No. 121, which deals with those who are temporarily away from their homes in Scotland because they are serving in Her Majesty's armed forces. The Labour party likes to present its devolution proposals as patriotic, but I cannot begin to see any genuine patriotism in disfranchising those Scottish and Welsh soldiers who form some of the finest regiments in the British army.

Yet without any reciprocity, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) has pointed out, the Bill denies a say to many natives of Wales and Scotland, while giving a say to citizens of the European Union who happen to be residing temporarily in those countries. So in some cases there will be a vote for people born in Athens but not in Arbroath, a vote for people born in Samos but not in Stornaway, and a vote for those born in Grasse but not, alas, in Gorseinon. Many questions spring from those propositions and call for answers.

Why is the franchise to be determined by entitlement to vote in local government elections? Why should it not be entitlement to vote in parliamentary elections? What is the reasoning behind that? What considerations led the Government to that view? Why not establish a central register of electors for the precise purpose of establishing those who are to participate in the decision that will be taken as establishing the settled will of the people of Scotland?

Why not have provisions to make obtaining the vote impossible for people newly arrived in Scotland who are only temporarily resident? Such people may have arrived only a couple of weeks before the due date but fulfil the qualifications and may be entitled to vote. Why not have a time limit? Why not say that the person concerned must

have been resident in Scotland or Wales for a period of three or six months so that they have a legitimate locus standi for taking part in the decision?

Mr. Cash: My right hon. and learned Friend is delicately tripping around the amendments. I have been driven to notice that he has not referred to the lead amendment. What does he think about the proposal to extend the franchise to the whole of the United Kingdom? If he is not minded to vote for it, why not?

Mr. Howard: I know my hon. Friend far too well to think that I could get away without addressing his question. I promise that I shall come to it before I sit down.

I have asked some of the questions to which I hope that we shall get serious answers from the Minister before we are subjected to the arbitrary fall of the guillotine. It is a reflection of the mischief of the guillotine procedure that we have not been able to examine such serious questions in detail. We should have been able in Committee to canvass in detail the relative advantages and disadvantages of a franchise based on local government elections or parliamentary elections or a central register. There are serious arguments for and, no doubt, against each of those options. If the Government had not been so heavy-handed, we would have been able to address those questions fully and effectively and so come to a conclusion that would have enabled the outcome of the referendum to be seen much more genuinely, properly and effectively as establishing the settled will of the people of Scotland.

I hope that the Minister will deal specifically with amendment No. 121, which the Opposition Front-Bench team would certainly have supported had it come to a vote. I do not know whether the question to which it gives rise will go down in history as the Sevenoaks question, the Bosnian question or, indeed, the North Essex question, but it is important and deserves a comprehensive answer.

I have much sympathy with the thought that caused my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) to move amendment No. 2. I understand why he moved it and why I imagine that he will press it to a Division. We have given some consideration to the matter and do not think it right at this stage to support it. That does not mean that the proposals do not have implications for the rest of the United Kingdom which may warrant wider consideration in due course.

We have yet to see whether the Government will provide any sort of answer to the West Lothian question, or whether they will begin to address the over-representation of constituencies in Scotland. We have no idea whether the Government will take seriously the financial implications of their proposals, not least the question that will arise in due course of what would happen to the contribution made by the rest of the United Kingdom to the financing of services in Scotland if, however unlikely it may be, a Scottish Parliament decided to use its tax-varying powers to reduce the burden of taxation on the people of Scotland. Those fundamental questions go to the heart of the legislation. If satisfactory answers are not provided, we may well have to revisit the question whether those who reside in other parts of United Kingdom should have a say on the outcome of the proposals.

For the moment, we await the answers that I hope that we will get from the Minister on the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone and to the other important and legitimate questions raised by my Friends in this all-too-brief debate. If the Government's proposals are to acquire real legitimacy—which must be their objective, and we do not seek to challenge it—they must provide convincing answers. I look forward to hearing what answers the Minister will provide.

8.15 pm

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): I am delighted to respond to the debate and will certainly take up the challenge put forward by some Conservative Members on important issues. I am struck by the fact that we spent three hours on a previous motion on timetabling discussing our inability to have a debate. We have had 10 speeches, including some excellent contributions that were concisely put. Perhaps it is an exemplar of the way in which the House should conduct itself in other matters, and in respect of the rest of the Bill.

Mr. Luff *rose—*

Mr. McLeish: I shall not give way at this stage. As always, I shall allow interventions later.

I am impressed by the fragile fraternity that exists among Conservative Members in respect of their coherent approach to the submission of amendments. That is a problem for the Opposition, not for Her Majesty's Government. In passing, I am sure that Labour Members and other hon. Members are a bit sick of being lectured about damaging the Union when this measure is designed to strengthen it. Patriotism is not the preserve of the Opposition when uttered in the way that it has been. All hon. Members take great pride in the House; it is one of the binding qualities that keep us here arguing so coherently.

I have some useful advice for the Opposition. It is only four weeks since the rout, but, at some time, they will have to acknowledge the debate that is taking place in their party in Scotland. That is friendly advice. As has been said, in Wales and Scotland the Tories need some nurturing by the Westminster-based parliamentary party. *[Interruption.]* It is my style to be helpful to the Opposition. *[Interruption.]* It is not patronising—it is sound advice which I hope that the Opposition will take.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): On a point of order, Mr. Martin. Is it appropriate in a debate that has been guillotined for the Minister to make such patronising general observations instead of responding to the questions that he has been asked?

The First Deputy Chairman: I must allow the Minister to make his speech in his own way.

Mr. McLeish: My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and the hon. Members for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) and for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) raised an important issue. Things have moved on since the 1975 referendum. If hon. Members had gone to the Library, they would have found the relevant clause. Service voters can make a service declaration for an

[Mr. McLeish]

address in the United Kingdom. It may be their home address or another, for example, that of their parents—whatever would be their residence in the UK if they were not serving abroad.

Clearly, it is not possible this evening to specify answers for individuals without knowing personal circumstances. I confirm that service personnel who are resident in Scotland will not lose their votes by virtue of serving abroad. To be helpful, I shall spell out the current position in detail. There is no need for further provisions in the Bill because the facility already exists, and we guarantee that it will be exercised in respect of this referendum.

Mr. Fallon: I am extremely grateful to the Minister of State for what he said. I would wish to study his words. Does he mean that a service man who has been posted from Scotland to Catterick and then from Catterick, as part of the brigade, to serve in Bosnia, will be deprived of his vote because originally he was resident in Catterick?

Mr. McLeish: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point and I would wish to respond to it specifically. My understanding is that the situation that he has outlined would be covered. We are talking about the residency issue in Scotland in terms of the declaration that would be made by service men and women who are not operating in their employment in Scotland. With the approval of the Committee, that is one of the issues with which I should like to deal specifically, and I certainly will.

Mr. Luff: When? The Minister is on his feet. Deal with the issue now.

Mr. McLeish: My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow raised an interesting point on the Gary McAllister question.

Mr. Luff: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLeish: No, I have made the point.

Mr. Luff: When will you deal with the issue?

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The Minister has made it clear that he will not give way. I ask hon. Members to cease interrupting while the Minister is addressing the Committee.

Mr. McLeish: When Ministers are trying to be helpful I think that some courtesy should be extended to them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. McLeish: No, I am not giving way. I want to deal with the questions that have been asked. On the one hand, Members want answers, but, on the other, they want to continue to filibuster.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow made an interesting contribution on the so-called Gary McAllister question, a matter with which I wanted to deal. My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) raised the Paul Lambert and John Collins questions. I can tell hon. Members, whether it entertains or worries them, that there will be a Paul Gascoigne factor. I am sure that he will have a vote in the referendum if the Bill passes through the House of Commons.

The purpose behind the large group of amendments that is before us is to change eligibility to vote in a variety of ways. Some amendments are designed to allow people who are resident in any part of the United Kingdom to vote in the referendum, while some amendments are designed to change the franchise from local government to parliamentary status. Others are designed to enable people with only a tenuous claim to Scottish or Welsh roots to vote. That procedure is usually reserved for filling football teams. Other amendments have been tabled with a view to requiring a pledge hand on heart for potential Scottish or Welsh residents that they will move to those countries. None of these amendments is acceptable to the Government.

Mr. Cash: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLeish: No. I want to make some progress. I shall, however, allow the hon. Gentleman back into the debate later.

The questions whether there should be a Scottish Parliament or a Welsh Assembly are primarily for the people in Scotland and Wales as they are most affected by devolution.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. Would it be in order for the Minister to write to hon. Members with the details of the answers that he currently does not have time to give us? I am no clearer now than 20 minutes ago whether the Royal Scots in Colchester will get a vote in the referendum.

The First Deputy Chairman: Writing to Members is a matter for the Minister and not one for the Chair.

Mr. Cash: On a point of order, Mr. Martin.

The First Deputy Chairman: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr. Cash: It is, Mr. Martin. It happens that I tabled the lead amendment. I have attempted to get the Minister to answer the question that I have posed. It is a convention of the House of Commons that a Minister is expected to deal with the question raised within the terms of the first amendment in the group. The Minister has not responded to it yet.

The First Deputy Chairman: Continual interventions will stop a Minister or any other Member from responding to questions. The Minister will not give way, and that is a Minister's privilege.

Mr. McLeish: My usual style, Mr. Martin, is to give way to interventions. I am trying to balance the fact that only eight minutes are available to me in which I might try to answer some of the questions asked against continual interventions that are of no particular substance.

I have answered the question of service registration. I think that it is sufficient to leave the matter there for the present. I shall be writing to those hon. Members who have raised the issue.

Amendments Nos. 83 and 85 would add to the electorate any person born in Scotland and Wales who is entitled to vote in a general election in any part of the United Kingdom. That would allow someone born of English parents who has lived all his life in England and has no connection with either Scotland or Wales to vote in a referendum because, by chance, he happened to be born in Scotland or Wales. Why should such a person have any more right to vote than, say, a Scot who is now living in England?

Amendments Nos. 148, 152, 160, 164 and new schedules 2 and 3 are attempts to set up a central register of electors for the referendum. That register would allow five additional groups to vote in the referendum. Members might wish to read the new schedules to learn exactly what hon. Members have in mind for their fair franchise. Perhaps those concerned would like to explain just how their fourth and fifth categories of voter would take their so-called oath of allegiance, promising to live permanently in Scotland. Would they have to take the oath standing on the Stone of Destiny? Would squads of Scots police pursue absconders south of the border and drag them, kicking and screaming, back to their hielan' hame? Hon. Members will have to do better than that if they want their amendments and new schedules to be taken seriously.

The key criterion for deciding who should vote, in terms of our proposals, must be residency. Many hon. Members have confirmed today that that is the sensible, logical and effective way in which to proceed. I accept that people in parts of the United Kingdom other than Scotland and Wales will have a genuine interest. As hon. Members who have promoted the amendments have demonstrated by their own actions, eligibility to vote must depend on more than just interest.

The principle has been well established in previous referendums. For example, in 1973 the people of Northern Ireland voted on the constitutional status of that part of the UK. In 1975, people in all parts of the UK voted on continued membership of the EC. In 1979, the people of Scotland and Wales voted on the devolution plans of the time. On each occasion, the principle of residency was applied.

The Bill has, of course, been debated by the UK Parliament, as will be the Bills to establish a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly, subject to the outcomes of the referendums. These debates will provide ample opportunity for the interests of people in all parts of the UK to be taken into account through Members of the House of Commons. That seems to strike the right balance between seeking the consent of those most obviously affected by the proposals and ensuring that the interests of the UK as a whole are taken into account.

As an aside, looking ahead to a possible referendum on Europe, would hon. Members suggest that as the UK's membership has an effect stretching well beyond its borders, citizens of all other member states should be entitled to vote on UK membership?

Those who support amendment No. 121 have raised an important issue. Obviously, we want to ensure that service voters have the right to participate. I have tried to reassure the Committee that that is the case. As a courtesy, I want to explain in detail the current position so that hon. Members are left in no doubt that it is the reality. We shall ensure that it is operational when the referendum takes place.

The current arrangements are apparently working well and it seems important that we should allow them to continue to do so.

Amendment No. 120 would, if accepted, stretch some of the points raised this evening even further. I do not seek to be frivolous in any way, but the amendment could allow someone born in, for example, Bolivia of Bolivian parents, who has never visited Scotland, to vote in the referendum merely because his granny was a Scot. What sort of fairness is that in relation to what we are attempting to do on franchise?

Obviously and understandably, Conservative Members have tried to range wide in our discussions today. However, the substantive Scotland and Wales Bills will come before us later in the Session. It is important to remember that, despite the timetabling motion, we shall have an opportunity to raise at a later stage some of the issues that have been highlighted by Conservative Members this evening. At present, we must remain within the strict terms of the timetable motion if we are to keep in order.

Mr. Cash: The Minister has still not attempted in any way to answer the main question that has been raised this evening. Will he answer a simple question: why are the Government not prepared to extend the franchise under these referendums to the whole of the United Kingdom? Will he answer that simple question?

Mr. McLeish: I have already answered that question. I have said that the issue of the referendums is primarily one for Scottish and Welsh voters. It must be recognised, however, that the House of Commons, in discussing the Bill during its various stages, will have the chance to reflect the views of everyone living in the United Kingdom. It is vital that that is emphasised. It seems that despite attempting to curtail comments on the timetable motion there is the view around that in some way the House of Commons will be deprived of the possibility of looking in depth at the proposals.

I want to go some way to allay the fears of Conservative Members, if they are genuine fears. We intend to publish a substantial White Paper, and there will be a debate in the House. The White Paper will inform the campaign before the referendum takes place. That is vital, because we want Scottish and Welsh voters to know what they are voting on.

The White Paper, informed by the results of the referendums, will form the basis on which we shall develop the Bill. That will give us ample opportunity to ensure that every sector of the United Kingdom is represented through individual Members of Parliament. That is a reassurance, and we intend to make it a reality.

Mr. Garnier: In the final few minutes, will the hon. Gentleman condescend to address amendments Nos. 140 and 141?

Mr. McLeish: I have responded to the franchising issues. We believe that we should resist the amendments.

It being half-past Eight o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *proceeded, pursuant to the Order this day, to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 80, Noes 411.

Division No. 9] **[8.30 pm**

AYES

Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian (S Dorset)
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cran, James
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hunter, Andrew
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. Christopher Gill.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*

Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steven
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Wallace: I beg to move amendment No. 87, in page 1, line 6, leave out

'and tax varying powers of a Scottish Parliament'

and insert

'of a Scottish Parliament with tax–raising powers.'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 111, in page 1, line 6, leave out 'tax–varying'.

No. 145, in page 1, line 7, leave out 'varying' and insert 'raising'.

No. 112, in page 1, line 7, leave out 'Parliament' and insert 'Assembly'.

No. 88, in page 1, line 9, leave out 'papers' and insert 'paper'.

No. 203, in page 1, line 10, leave out '1' and insert

'*(Referendum in Scotland (No. 2))*.

No. 200, in page 1, line 22, leave out from 'certify' to second 'the'.

No. 89, in page 1, line 22, leave out

'for each of the two forms of ballot paper.'.

No. 90, in page 1, line 25, leave out

'for each of the two forms of ballot paper.'.

[Mr. Wallace]

No. 92, in schedule 1, page 4, leave out lines 3 and 4 and insert

': FORM OF BALLOT PAPER'.

No. 95, in page 4, line 6, after 'Parliament', insert 'with tax-varying powers'.

No. 93, in page 4, line 9, at end insert

'WITH TAX-VARYING POWERS'.

No. 94, in page 4, line 12, at end insert

'WITH TAX-VARYING POWERS'.

No. 76, in page 4, leave out lines 13 to 22.

New schedule 8—*Referendum in Scotland (No. 2)*—

Part 1

FORM OF FIRST BALLOT PAPER

Parliament has decided to consult people in Scotland on the Government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament.

Put a cross (X) in the appropriate box:

I AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT WITH TAX-RAISING POWERS'.

OR

I DO NOT AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT WITH TAX-RAISING POWERS.'.

Mr. Wallace: The amendment would adapt the Scottish referendum. It would no longer involve two separate ballot papers, one asking the electorate whether they agreed with the Government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament and the other asking whether they agreed that that Parliament should have tax-varying powers. The purpose of the amendment—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. There is too much noise in the Chamber. The hon. Gentleman is entitled to be heard.

Mr. Wallace: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

The amendment seeks to consolidate the two questions into one. The people of Scotland would be asked in a referendum whether they agreed that there should be a Scottish Parliament with tax-varying powers. Obviously, there would be only one ballot paper, but the single question would reflect the content of the two questions that the Government wish to put to the Scottish people.

On Second Reading, I explained why Scottish Liberal Democrats were not persuaded of the need for a referendum in Scotland. We have voiced our opposition to the second question. I have been asked many times by Mr. Kenny McIntyre, Mr. Brian Taylor and Ms Kirsty Wark what I would do about the second question and I have said, "If it comes to it, I shall table an amendment to delete it." I am trying to fulfil that commitment.

The origin of the second question may be linked to the origin of the referendum. It is our perception that Labour was nervous about the taxation issue. I negotiated and worked with Labour in the constitutional convention, and I do not doubt for a minute that the party is persuaded of the merits of a Scottish Parliament with taxation powers. However, it was clear in the run-up to the general election that the word "tax" was slightly frightening the party, and that effect was perceived not least in the Chancellor of the Exchequer and his Treasury team, and especially in the Minister without Portfolio, who did his utmost in the years leading up to the election to make sure that the word "tax" became neutral.

Labour said during the election campaign that there would be no increase in United Kingdom tax rates during the lifetime of this Parliament. My hon. Friends and I took the view that the strategy of not frightening the natives or the horses with the word "tax" could be undermined if Conservatives pointed north of the border and said, "There is the real Labour party because it proposes to establish a tax-raising Parliament." Labour had to try to neutralise that.

The press floated some ideas of what Labour might do. For example, it said that a Labour Government might incorporate a 75 per cent. voting threshold in a Scottish Parliament for tax powers to be implemented, or that there might be a provision in the Act to allow the taxation powers of the Parliament to be activated only in its second term. Labour came up with a referendum that made specific reference to tax powers so that the party could say to middle England, "Labour is not a taxation party at all. We have even given the Scots the choice about whether they want a Scottish Parliament to have taxation powers."

It has been said that the referendum was foisted on Labour by Islington. That is at least two miles better than the distance from which the Conservatives worked because they foisted things on Scotland from Downing street and Whitehall. The Scottish Labour party executive, which, when it comes to a head count, is a large vocal minority, strongly opposed the referendum and the tax powers. However, when faced with the reality of what it was being asked to do by London, it went one better and had a second referendum agreed with three questions. Under that, the taxation powers of the Scottish Parliament could not have been activated without a further referendum, in which the Parliament would have said, "We are about to use the tax powers. Do you want us to use them?" That is like giving turkeys the power to vote for Christmas.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): At one stage, I think that there was a proposal for a third referendum, in which people would have been asked, "Are you absolutely sure?"

Mr. Wallace: That sounds like a Northern Ireland referendum.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Am I right in thinking that the second proposed referendum was described by the Prime Minister, who was at that time the Leader of the Opposition, as the mature and sensible decision of the Scottish executive committee?

Mr. Wallace: I think that I mentioned that on Second Reading. The "mature and sensible decision" that was proposed by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) was disposed of seven days later by the now Secretary of State for Defence, who had come to his senses in the meantime.

During the election campaign, there were signs that, notwithstanding the fact that tax powers might be agreed by the Scottish people in a referendum, Labour would still

be reluctant to use them in its first term. I hope that I can persuade the Minister to have second thoughts. We are not dealing with a principle; nor do I think that Labour ever sought to argue the issue on principle. It is a tactic and, to be fair, it has served Labour well. The issue of tax was neutralised and Labour successfully kicked it into touch.

As I said, our single question would refer to the tax-varying powers of the Parliament. I emphasise that, because in the context of our proposals for setting up a Scottish Parliament, we are not afraid of the tax issue. There is no need for us to apologise for the fiscal powers that we and the Government want for that Parliament. Tax establishes the nexus of accountability between those who are elected and those who elect them. People will be elected to the Scottish Parliament to make decisions about political priorities in Scotland, and they must not be allowed to hide behind a shield or to create a scapegoat by saying, "We were not allowed to raise the money for this."

In the general election, we argued for 1p on the standard rate of tax to fund education. The Liberal Democrats did extremely well in the election. We doubled our number, but we did not quite make 331, so we are not able to implement that policy. That is a pity in terms of investment in education. If the Scottish people want to vote to put a party in the Scottish Parliament that will make a greater investment in education, they should be able to do that. If Scotland wants to lead the way, as it often has, not least in education, it should be able to do so. That is why we believe in the importance of the flexibility that taxation powers will confer.

Mr. Dalyell: Perhaps we could be clear on exactly who is to be taxed. For example, should Scots who spend more than half the year working in England be taxed?

Mr. Wallace: Such issues are important, and I have no doubt that the legislation will address them in detail. I have always understood that there are clear residency rules for taxation in the United Kingdom. By simple analogy and application, the same situation could apply in Scotland. For example, I do not think that Gary McAllister lives for more than half the year in Scotland. There is no question of his not being taxed, even on the bonus that he will receive when Scotland qualifies for next year's World cup finals in France.

Mr. Garnier: Forgive me if I am being a little obtuse, but is it a prerequisite of voting in the truncated or one-question referendum ballot paper that the hon. Gentleman envisages that the voter must be a potential taxpayer, or may non-taxpayers also vote?

Mr. Wallace: Of course non-taxpayers will also vote. The fact that we have tax thresholds means that a number of people do not pay tax because their income, regrettably, is insufficient. They will be eligible to vote, as will people who are on social security and do not pay tax. As you are aware, Mr. Martin, from having sat through a large part of our earlier debate, the referendum franchise will essentially be governed by residency and, unlike that for parliamentary elections, it will include peers and European Union citizens who are in Scotland. Of course, peers and EU citizens resident in Scotland pay tax, but taxation is not the basis of the franchise; nor is it the basis of the franchise for elections to the United Kingdom Parliament.

The point I was making was that taxation powers are critical to the Scottish Parliament, to give it flexibility and accountability. Indeed, the absence of tax powers was identified by Conservatives and others as one of the weaknesses of the Scotland Act 1978. People may recall that, when the Bill was going through another place, Lord Home said that the Scottish Assembly had to have some ability to raise revenue, or we should be "asking for trouble".

Those of us who were involved in the referendum campaign may remember that the great promise to the Scottish people, at the behest of the late Lord Home, was that, if they rejected the proposals, an incoming Conservative Government might offer them something better. Of course, that never materialised. Many of us saw through that ploy at the time, but it is important to remember that the absence of tax powers was seen as a weakness. Many of my hon. Friends who were in Parliament at that time agreed with that, but thought that half a loaf was better than no loaf at all. We would certainly now take the view that tax powers are absolutely essential.

9 pm

The other argument that is put against the tax powers is that having tax rates in Scotland that varied from those in the rest of the United Kingdom would cause substantial problems. Many businesses have come to Scotland. Inward investment in Scotland has been significant over recent months and years, and that is by companies that have known that there was a distinct possibility—indeed that it was increasingly likely—that a Scottish Parliament would be established with tax powers. That has not turned them away. I suspect that fluctuating exchange rates and the pace of technological change and innovation are much more influential in determining investment decisions than the fact that Scotland may have a different tax rate, plus or minus 3p, from the rest of the UK.

Already there are significant differences, even in personal taxation, within Scotland and within the UK. Council taxes vary from local authority to local authority. The siren voices coming from the Conservative party tell us that, because Scotland might conceivably—of course this would happen only if the people of Scotland had voted for it—have a higher tax rate, perhaps by 1p in the pound, people are going to flood out of Scotland and go to work in England. By the same token, because Shetland has the lowest council tax rate in Scotland, I am surprised that there has not been a huge influx of people from all over Scotland, indeed from other parts of the UK, to live in Shetland, not only for the privilege of paying a lower council tax, but for the many other privileges that go with living in Shetland. Clearly, there are a number of reasons why people decide to invest in a particular place.

Because the council tax bands in Scotland are materially different from those in England and Wales, similarly valued houses in Carlisle and in Dumfries can have different council tax rates. Because of the banding, the council tax for a house in Dumfries can be much higher than that for a similarly priced house in Carlisle, yet there is no evidence of a drain of people from Dumfries and Galloway into Cumbria. Because I was born and brought up in those parts, I know that companies recruit from both sides of the Borders, and in recent times

[Mr. Wallace]

that has never been identified as a problem in terms of recruitment. Therefore, the case for the tax powers is considerable.

As I said, we wish to consolidate the two questions. Why not have the two questions? In many respects, although the Labour Government, perhaps anticipating the next debate, will say that they are against a multi-option referendum, with the two questions, they are offering a variation on the multi-option referendum. We shall have the status quo as one option. Another option will be the scheme proposed by the Scottish Constitutional Convention—a Scottish Parliament with taxation powers—and the third option will be a Scottish Parliament without taxation powers. The odd thing is that no serious person within the home rule movement in Scotland currently advocates a Scottish Parliament without taxation powers.

I understand that, in a recent interview, the Minister of State said that, if the outcome of the referendum were yes, no, the Government would be prepared to legislate for a Scottish Parliament without taxation powers—indeed, for a Parliament that no one is campaigning for. I have no doubt that the Government's good faith and commitment is to a Scottish Parliament with taxation powers. I am sure that they believe that that is in the best interests of Scotland. However, that raises an interesting question, which I hope that the Minister will answer when he replies to the debate. Why are the Government prepared to contemplate, at least in theory, and prepared to put into practice—they have indicated that they would—legislation that they believe would be less than in Scotland's best interests?

I know that the Conservative party believes that it is not in Scotland's best interest to have a tax-varying Parliament, but I believe that it should have a tax-varying Parliament and I know that that is what the Government believe; we must be concerned that they are prepared to legislate for something less than that. The Government must answer that question.

We are elected to exercise our judgment in the best interests of our constituents and our country. If our judgment is that Scotland should have a Parliament with the full taxation powers proposed by the Scottish Constitutional Convention, we should be wary of trying to legislate for anything less than that.

I fear that if a Parliament does not have taxation powers, that could be the recipe for the break-up of the United Kingdom and for an unstable Parliament. If, for example, the Parliament could not deliver a new hospital in Arbroath or a new school or school refurbishment in Greenock, it would be easy for a Member of the Scottish Parliament to say that there was not enough money, because Westminster would not provide it, and to complain that the Parliament did not have the power to vote any money for itself. That could lead to instability.

Another possible outcome of the multi-choice option is that there could be a no, yes vote. Some people say that they do not want to risk a Scottish Parliament without taxation powers, so they will not provide a blank cheque by voting yes on the first question. However, they may want to ensure that if there is a Parliament, it will have taxation powers, so they will vote yes on the second question. I have heard some Conservative supporters say that they do not support a Scottish Parliament, but that if there is to be one, it should have the proper accountability that comes with taxation. That would give a no, yes outcome. No one has told us what will happen if we get a no, yes outcome.

Another point of concern to my hon. Friends is that there is the possibility of unstitching a key part of the Scottish Constitutional Convention scheme. I know that that is not what the Government wish, but it is what they are positing as a possibility. During the general election, the present Prime Minister said that even English parish councils have tax powers. Some people took advantage of that and said that he was comparing a Scottish Parliament to an English parish council. I understood him to mean that if an English parish council can have tax powers, a fortiori, a Scottish Parliament should have tax powers. We are being asked to accept the possibility of a Scottish Parliament without tax powers. If it is good enough for an English parish council, it must be good enough for a Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Will my hon. Friend confirm that parish councils in England are not subject to a limitation on the amount of taxation that they can raise within the tax area that they are granted? In fact, if we take the Prime Minister's analogy a little further, it would be appropriate to remove the upper and lower ceiling on the variation of revenue-raising powers which it is now proposed to give to the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Wallace: That was a helpful intervention. I bow to my hon. Friend's knowledge of English parish councils. I thought that the powers were more limited, but I am interested to hear those points. It strengthens the case. If English parish councils have that degree of flexibility and the accountability that goes with it, it is even more worrying that the Government would be prepared to countenance the possibility of losing the more modest and limited powers proposed for a Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): Is not it even more extraordinary that the Government are not even prepared to consider such options for Wales?

Mr. Wallace: I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about the absence of tax-varying powers from the Welsh proposals. I am sure that some of my Welsh colleagues will wish to make that point.

I want to make it clear that if we were to lose the amendment in a vote tonight, my party would enthusiastically support the campaign for a yes, yes outcome. We want a Scottish Parliament. That has been Liberal policy for the best part of a century and we want it delivered. There is a real expectation in Scotland that, this time, it will be delivered.

I ask the Minister to consider, even at this late stage, the merits of consolidating the two questions. In many respects, that would honour the commitment that the Labour party made in its manifesto, as it would be a question on the Scottish Parliament itself, with the clear highlighting of the fact that that Parliament would have tax-raising powers. By consolidating the questions, we would not run the risk of causing some of the problems that I mentioned.

One reason for the opposition in Scotland to a referendum when the Labour party announced its proposal last June was that people identified it in their minds with

the 1978-79 wrecking tactic, especially the 40 per cent. rule. I do not believe that the Government want to wreck the process. It is clear from what has been said and from the passion with which the Secretary of State put the case this afternoon that that is far from the Government's intention. However, as those who know the history of home rule in Scotland are well aware, there has been many a slip in thinking that a full-blooded Scottish Parliament is in our grasp and then letting it slip away through some fault of our own. We do not want that to happen now.

We believe that by asking the single question that we have proposed, all concerns can be embraced. I have every confidence that we would get an overwhelming yes vote, and then we could get on with the real business of creating Scottish and Welsh Parliaments for the next millennium.

Mr. Ancram: I want to deal with some of the amendments grouped with amendment No. 87, and thereby broaden our debate.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on his courage. After four weeks of total adulation of the Labour Government, he has at last been brave enough to be mildly critical of their proposals. We hope that it is the forerunner of many other occasions when the new Liberal Democrat party will behave more as a part of the Opposition than as an adjunct to the Government.

The aim of the amendment is to consolidate the proposed two questions into a single question on a single ballot paper. Although I cannot support the wording, which would create something inimical to the Opposition's views, it may avoid certain distortions and anomalies that could arise from having two papers. I understand that some people—I hope that I do not do the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) an injustice in including him—take the view that they might say no to a Scottish Parliament, but that if there were to be one anyway they would wish it to have tax-raising powers. Under the Bill, there could be a no vote on the first question of a simple Scottish Parliament and a yes vote to one with tax-raising powers. If that is a broad response, it could produce the most extraordinarily distorted result. I hope that the Government will consider that point carefully. If they are trying to assess the opinion of the Scottish and, indeed, the Welsh through a referendum, the last thing they want is a result that makes no sense.

I want to broaden the debate because it goes to the heart of one of our objections to the way in which the Bill is framed and is being taken through the House. The Bill attempts to lull the electorates in Scotland and Wales by asking the questions that Ministers think will be the least likely to create fear in the hearts of those electorates and, therefore, the least likely to be rejected.

The achievement of that objective was why we saw such an extraordinary parade of proposals. The Labour party first proposed one referendum, then one referendum with two questions, then two referendums, and then, once again, one referendum with two questions. It was Labour's attempt to present the formula that it believed would create the least offence and fear in the minds of the people of Scotland. Conversely, the Opposition have forcefully argued that a referendum should take place only after all the information is available to the people of Scotland, so that they can make a valid judgment on whether to say yes or no to the proposals.

9.15 pm

The question that is currently proposed is anodyne. It states:

"I agree that there should be a Scottish Parliament",

but does not even suggest whether a Scottish Parliament will be established as specified in a White Paper or in legislation. The prelude to the questions on the ballot paper, in schedule 1, mentions

"the Government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament",

but it does not state what those proposals will be or mention a Command Paper. The real questions are left hanging in the air. As I said in a previous speech, a question such as, "I agree that there should be a Scottish Parliament", would not even necessarily mean establishing a devolved Parliament within the United Kingdom, because it could mean establishing a Scottish Parliament within an independent Scotland.

The second question states:

"I agree that a Scottish Parliament should have tax-varying powers".

"Varying" is a wonderful word of comfort. In amendment No. 87, the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland included the words "tax-raising", and he was right and honest to do so. Like all hon. Members, he knows that, if we establish a Scottish Parliament and provide it with all sorts of powers to do all sorts of things, it will be looking for the resources with which to do them. If we provide a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers, the almost inevitable consequence will be that those tax-raising powers will be used and that the Scottish people will consequently be financially disadvantaged.

Sir Robert Smith: I wonder what the hon. Gentleman thinks would happen to his party's fortunes in an election to a Scottish Parliament. I have contested local elections in which the Conservative candidate has stood on a platform of cutting expenditure and tax. Does he not believe that, in elections to a Scottish Parliament, the people of Scotland might vote for Conservative candidates who stand on such a platform?

Mr. Ancram: If that hypothesis were correct, a very interesting question would arise. As we know, Scotland is financed by a formula block, which is provided by the UK Parliament and Government. If there were to be a tax reduction, we would need to know, before a referendum, whether it would be paid for by the English taxpayer through taxation that is paid into the Scottish block, or deducted from the Scottish block, with a consequent reduction in services for people in Scotland. I do not know the answer to that question, because I am not making the proposals. If there is to be a genuine and valid referendum in which people can make a judgment, that is precisely the type of question that will have to be answered.

Mr. Fallon: Has it occurred to my right hon. Friend that the Government do not know the answer to that question? This is the first referendum Bill that does not

[Mr. Fallon]

bear the name of any Treasury Minister—neither the Chancellor of the Exchequer nor the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has signed it—among its list of supporters. Is that perhaps because, as we read two weeks ago, the Chancellor of the Exchequer

"has gone very cool on devolution"?

Mr. Ancram: That is a very interesting question, which we can include on the list of questions that we should like the Minister to answer. Given our experience to date, however, we are unlikely to receive answers to any of those questions. Nevertheless, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for asking his question.

A referendum is being proposed on questions that are so anodyne and so ambiguous that the people of Scotland will not be able to make a valid judgment. They will not, therefore, be able to provide an answer on which we can proceed with confidence.

There are a vast number of unanswered questions, such as that asked by the hon. Member for Linlithgow about who will pay the tax because, presumably, the rate at which it is set will depend on who pays it? Will a higher tax in Scotland lead to an increase in overheads in Scotland and therefore a loss of competitiveness because people ask for higher wages to make up for the fact that they pay higher taxes? Will that be a disincentive to people working in Scotland? I come originally from the borders where it would not be difficult for people to move across into England to work if they thought they would pay lower taxes. That would greatly disadvantage those who live in the borders and the economy of the area.

We are asked to decide on the Bill and on the referendum but we do not know the details of the proposals. We are told that we shall see the White Paper before the House rises for the summer. We are told that we shall have a debate on it but not how long that debate will be or how detailed the White Paper will be.

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution said in the debate on the previous group of amendments that we would be able to consider the proposals in depth. If that is correct, and if the Minister is referring not only to the White Paper but to the proposals in the form of legislation, does it mean that we shall be able to have a debate on the Floor of the House? The Minister went on to say that such a debate would be the opportunity for people from all parts of the United Kingdom, through their elected representatives, to examine the proposals. Is he therefore saying that the proposals will not be sent to a Scottish Standing Committee but that Members from all parts of the United Kingdom will be able to participate in the Committee stage? We need to know the answers. It is not enough for the Minister of State to shake his head and say that he cannot provide those answers. If we are to allow the Bill to proceed, answers to such questions are germane to the decision that we must take.

We are debating whether taxes will go up or down, so we need to know what the Scottish Parliament is likely to be able to do. We need to know the answer to questions such as what will be the remuneration of members of the Scottish Parliament? How many staff will be required to run it, and what will be the costs involved? How will the Scottish Parliament be funded—out of the Scottish block or, more widely, from United Kingdom funds? What effect will the Scottish Parliament have on the Scottish block grant? Will the Scottish Parliament have powers of spending over education, the national health service or agriculture in Scotland? What powers will it be able to exercise in relation to the police, transport and planning in Scotland? Whether taxes are likely to go up or down depends on the answers to those questions. If the people of Scotland are to make a reasonable judgment, they need to know the answers before they vote in a referendum.

What powers will the Scottish Parliament have to provide housing in Scotland? Who will be liable for the taxes levied by the Scottish Parliament? Such questions must at least form part of a White Paper, and if they do they will have to be debated at length and in depth so that no question mark is left in the minds of the people of Scotland when they vote.

As we have heard, in previous referendums of this sort it has always been the practice to have the legislation in place before the referendum, precisely so that the people who vote know the answers to their questions and can make an appropriate judgment. I know, and I am sure my colleagues know, that the reason why the Government are fudging the issue is that at the last referendum, despite the fact that for years the opinion polls appeared to show great demand for devolution in Scotland, when the relevant legislation was introduced and examined and its implications for Scotland became known, support for devolution dropped dramatically and opposition to it increased dramatically. It is to avoid that danger—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State for Scotland arrives at precisely the right moment—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The right hon. Gentleman should resume his seat while I am talking. He should direct his remarks to the amendment. I am reluctant to interrupt his speech but it is going wide of the amendment.

Mr. Ancram: I thought that I was addressing the amendment. Our amendment No. 145 requires the leaving out of the word "varying" and the insertion of the word, "raising".

The First Deputy Chairman: The amendments, including the right hon. Gentleman's, are about tax-raising powers. That is what he must discuss. The wider issue of devolution is not up for debate. It is not my fault that the amendments are so restrictive, but he must stick to them.

Mr. Ancram: I accept your ruling, Mr. Martin. My difficulty, which I am sure that you share, is whether tax-raising powers are likely to be used. That will be in the minds of voters at a referendum. For them to be able to make a judgment they will need to know what powers a Scottish Parliament is to have. My point—I hope that I am not transgressing—is that if that question is to be posed in that way and is to make any sense to voters at a referendum, they will require that extra information. I am suggesting—within the limits of the amendments, I hope—that the Government have approached the issue as they have because they know that providing that information in detail, or even accepting the substitution of "tax-raising" for "tax-varying", suggested by the hon.

Member for Orkney and Shetland, would damage their chances of getting their proposals accepted in a referendum.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the least that the people of Scotland need is a clear undertaking that the favourable grant formula, which is very beneficial to Scotland, would not be affected by the tax-raising powers? Is it not vital that there should be a yes or no from the new Secretary of State on that point before any referendum?

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for providing another question to add to my list of important questions that need to be addressed if people are to make a reasonable choice in the referendum. The Secretary of State arrived a few minutes ago and raised his eyebrows, but he had not heard the debate. I think that he and I were in the same studio in 1979 when the results of the referendum came through. He arrived in the morning triumphant, expecting an overwhelming vote in favour of devolution. At the end of the day, I think that the figures were 33 per cent. for and 31 per cent. against, with the rest not bothering to vote. That was because the people of Scotland had the information on which to make the judgment. If we are to take seriously his assertion that the referendum is a democratic exercise, we need the information that I have asked for. If the amendments are passed, we shall be able to get it.

Mr. Dalyell: I wonder whether we could have some clarification, perhaps tonight, on who is to pay the tax. Is it to be anyone domiciled in Scotland? Some of us want an early statement on that, because, as I said during the debate on the Queen's Speech, part of the difficulty is that in international taxation, state borders provide the touchstone for separating the taxing rights of one fiscal regime from those of another. Where the border is not real, the imposition of tax by reference to the familiar tests of residence, domicile, source of income and location of trading operations is likely to be complex and expensive at best and unfair and a major brake on business in Scotland at worst.

We must face up to the issue. I listened with great care to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). If we are not careful, England will be, de facto, a tax haven, given that the border is not real in the way that federal states have real borders.

The hon. Gentleman could say that the Liberal Democrat solution is a federal one, but that would be different. If the argument is that there should be a federal state, my difficulty might arise less strongly because in a federal state the border would be far more real. However, given the Government's proposals, I say to my right hon. and hon. Friends that we must face up to the question of the border because of the creation of a de facto tax haven. If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is looking for a warning of this point, it was made at column 292 on 16 May.

9.30 pm

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Gentleman is raising an important point which, when we come to the White Paper and the devolution Bill, will rightly be dealt with in considerable detail. I am interested in what he says about the border and the advantages of federalism. I believe ultimately in a federal solution for the United Kingdom. What we are debating—the subject matter of the referendum—is a step towards that. I do not understand one point, however.

At the moment, we have a border that is a legal border because there are important differences between living in Carlisle and living in Dumfries in terms of criminal law and juvenile justice. At the moment, we have a meaningful border. Although there are many advantages in federalism, the border issue will not necessarily be any more clear cut with a federal state than under the proposals that we are debating.

Mr. Dalyell: These are complicated matters. I reply partly in terms of a problem that the hon. Gentleman raised—the problem of Scots who may spend a considerable time, possibly more than half the year, working outside Scotland. That point is not just an Aunt Sally; it is the problem of those who have rotating jobs. The matter was raised in acute form the other day by one of the major employers, Mr. Stewart of Scottish and Newcastle, who said that it was a real problem for the company's many executives and middle-rank employees. There should be early clarification of the matter because the more information we have the better and the healthier the debate will be.

We must get clear the residency rule. What about those who are on temporary secondment? That is a very real issue because there are lots of people on temporary secondment, which operates in both directions. It is no good saying that this is an arcane issue. For my sins—I do not know whether the Secretary of State has had the same experience—I was a member of nine Finance Bill Committees. One learns that one is legislating not for people of good will or for the mass of people who want to do the right thing, but for those who want to exploit the law to the fullest extent in order to get maximum benefit for themselves. That is part of the reason why laws have to be so tight in this case.

Mr. Fallon: Is it, therefore, the hon. Gentleman's position that we cannot finalise the details of either clause 1 or the shape of the ballot paper until we receive answers to those questions?

Mr. Dalyell: I have always taken the view—I have to be totally candid about this—that the meaningful referendum is on the question, "Do you approve of the 1997–98 Scotland Act as passed by Parliament?" Incidentally, throughout the election, that was the answer I made crystal clear to anyone who cared to ask. I am saying nothing in June that I did not say in March and April. I make that quite clear.

The Secretary of State courteously gave me a response in our previous debate on the Barnett formula—on the key question of whether the Barnett formula is to be preserved. I looked carefully at the response and I wish to ask the Minister who will wind up whether he is in a position to add anything to the answer that I was given the last time I asked the question.

Mr. Salmond: I was interested, as always, in the speech made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow

[Mr. Salmond]

(Mr. Dalyell). I suppose that he had some reason to speak on the issue; he was once described as a lonely and isolated figure—because he supported a referendum—by the previous spokesman for the Labour party in Scotland. Things have moved on; the hon. Gentleman may still be lonely and isolated, but not because of his support for a referendum.

Mr. Dalyell: It never occurred to me in my wildest dreams that it would be a pre-legislative referendum. My constituent in Linlithgow, if I may so refer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), is right to say that I was described as lonely and isolated. Various other comments were made at the same time, but we will stick at lonely and isolated. Never did I dream of anything other than a post-legislative referendum on the final outcome of the parliamentary discussions.

Mr. Salmond: I happily accept the designation as the hon. Member 's constituent. I did not vote for him—after much reflection, I decided to vote in Banff and Buchan—none the less, I am well represented in the House by the hon. Gentleman's efforts, and if I ever have a problem I will beat a path to his door.

I accept that if we are to have a referendum on the proposals, it is more logical to have a post-legislative referendum. That is a reasonable point to make. I would like an assurance from the Minister that, if he has his way in the pre-legislative referendum, we will not also have a post-legislative referendum.

Mr. McLeish *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Salmond: I see a helpful shake of the head from the Minister. Given the litany we heard from the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) of the permutations that the policy has gone through in the past year, I am sure that the Minister will accept that we need his firm assurance on that point, much to the disappointment of the hon. Member for Linlithgow and the Conservatives but to the great relief of the rest of us.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): What happens if the referendum vote is yes and, as a result of our debates, major changes are made to the legislation, so we end up with something very different from the White Paper that the Scottish people will consider this summer? Is not that possibility one reason for having a post-legislative referendum?

Mr. Salmond: If the House were to decide that independence for Scotland was a much better way forward, as I have always argued, that would be a substantive change and I would argue for an independence referendum. The hon. Gentleman does not seriously believe that there will be such a radical change, but if he has hopes that I can nourish I would be pleased to hear them. We cannot anticipate both a pre-legislative and a post-legislative referendum, because that would try the patience of this Scottish electorate beyond reasonable endurance.

I make a diametrically opposed interpretation of the Bill to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram). He argued that the Government's intention in suggesting a two-question referendum was to buttress the referendum and devolution proposals. I reached the opposite conclusion. I think that the reason for the referendum, without going through the full route march of the explanation, was to buttress the Government's prospects in the general election. The intention was to remove aspects of the constitutional proposals from the general election campaign.

The former right hon. Member for Stirling is but a distant memory, and has been replaced by the much more amenable hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), who is in her place as I would expect. Some people in Scottish politics felt a year or so ago that the tartan tax campaign being waged by the then Secretary of State for Scotland was successful. I never shared that opinion: the previous Secretary of State for Scotland, who was replaced by my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Morgan), had a much better tactical campaign in the 1992 election. He kept his major arguments until the immediate onset of the campaign. It struck many of us that the former right hon. Member for Stirling fired too many of his bullets on the tartan tax far too early.

I have no doubt that the decision to go for a two-question referendum was a direct result of fears about what the tartan tax campaign was doing to Labour's prospects not on the devolution proposals but in the general election. Those fears were misplaced, as we all probably agree in the comfortable aftermath of the general election. Unfortunately, they have left the House and the Scottish people with a proposal that does not make serious sense when it is analysed.

Such analysis has been extremely well conducted by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland, who pointed out that, in effect, one referendum, two questions produces a multi-option referendum. It gives us not the multi-option referendum that has been generally supported at one time or another across Scotland by many Labour Members, but one that offers a choice between the status quo, which was soundly rejected—it came third in most of the constitutional polls over the past few years—and a Parliament without tax-raising powers, which is not supported by any serious body of opinion in Scotland or, indeed, through the proposals of the Government or the Liberal Democrats. How can it be right to offer people a multi-option referendum through the device of two questions but not offer a proper, serious multi-option referendum of a choice between independence, devolution and the status quo?

Isolating the tax-varying power as part of a referendum is the worst possible thing to do if one is serious about a devolution proposal going through. In the 1992 general election, the campaign for which the Secretary of State for Scotland and I remember extremely well, the issue of a tartan tax was not raised to nearly the same extent—because it was then part of the convention proposal for what was called assigned revenues. The tax-varying power was part of a wider taxation remit. There was not the same isolation of part of the proposal, which is extremely weak and vulnerable to attack and criticism.

I cannot conceive of how anyone who is serious, optimistic and genuine about a devolution commitment thinks that extracting the weakest part of the devolution scheme and subjecting it to a second question, as opposed to doing so with, for example, a more popular aspect of it such as proportional representation, is in the interests

of constitutional change. That is an extremely dangerous, gambler's move on devolution. I nourish the deep suspicion that some of those who thought that that was a good idea—I excuse the Ministers sitting on the Treasury Bench of this entirely—did not sincerely wish the second question to be endorsed.

As the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said, what would happen if we got a yes, no result? The Liberal Democrats have been long-standing supporters of Scottish self government, yet in such circumstances, as they signalled in interviews, they would find themselves perhaps voting against a self-government proposal. What logic is there to a proposal that probably or possibly risks losing the votes of part of the coalition in favour of devolution as a result of a two-question referendum?

My party's main interest in the proceedings is to secure a genuine multi-option referendum to allow real free choice between the concepts of independence, devolution and the status quo—the referendum which is overwhelmingly supported in Scotland and which has been supported on both sides of the House. It was, incidentally, first a Liberal idea in the 1960s, proposed by the soon-to-be Lord Steel, so it has been supported by all parties and is still the right referendum to have, if we are to go through a referendum process.

It would be an improvement to subtract the second question. It would be in the interests of not confusing the electorate and of those of us who want constitutional progress in Scotland. In tomorrow's debate I intend to force the issue of a multi-option referendum; in the present debate I am inclined to support the amendment.

9.45 pm

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): I listened with interest to the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), because I recall that, more than 20 years ago, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was a rector of Edinburgh university and invited the right hon. Gentleman and me to become members of a commission to consider the workings of the university and, among other things, the repercussions on the university and on higher education in Scotland in general of the then Labour Government's proposal to set up a Scottish Parliament. My recollection is that the right hon. Gentleman was a keen supporter of the principle of a Scottish Assembly at that time and that he wanted to extend the powers proposed by the then Government to include the power to legislate on Scottish higher education.

Mr. Ancram: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not setting out intentionally to mislead. I was a supporter of devolution in 1968 and until about 1972, when I suddenly realised the cost of it to the Scottish people. Certainly, by the time I served on that commission with him, I had seen the light.

Mr. Canavan: The right hon. Gentleman is trying to rewrite history. He should read the manifesto on which he stood in Berwick and East Lothian at the general election in 1974, when the Scottish Tory party had a clear commitment to set up a Scottish Parliament, or Assembly, as it was called at the time. No wonder the voters of Berwick and East Lothian turfed him out; he then sought refuge in Edinburgh, South, and the people there turfed him out, after which he sought refuge in Devizes and in Belfast—he has been all over the place, trying to get power and a safe seat in his precious United Kingdom.

I listened with more respect to what the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) said on behalf of the Scottish Liberal Democrats, who were, and still are, our partners in the Scottish Constitutional Convention. I am not an enthusiastic supporter of the Bill, because I would far rather we spent our time on legislation to set up a Scottish Parliament instead of pussyfooting around and wasting time with this legislation.

The Government are clearly determined to hold a referendum, but I fail to understand the need for two propositions to be put to the people of Scotland—one on the principle of a Scottish Parliament and another on whether that Parliament should have revenue-raising powers.

There is no meaningful Parliament in the world that does not have revenue-raising powers. Even the smallest authority in Britain—if we do not want to talk about English parish councils we could mention the smallest local authority in Scotland, Clackmannanshire council—has revenue-raising powers, of which the last Tory Government approved. Of course, the Scottish Parliament will be far more powerful than any local authority.

Mr. Salmond: But not in terms of control over its own revenue. Clackmannanshire council controls approximately 10 per cent. of its revenue. With the tax-varying powers, the maximum that a Scottish Parliament can control will be 3 per cent.

Mr. Canavan: I take that point. Some of us argued within the convention that there should be more revenue-raising powers, including a case, perhaps, for all the revenue-raising within Scotland to be the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament. It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman and his party boycotted the Scottish Constitutional Convention. Had he not done so, he might have been there to lend his support to that argument, which was advanced by others as well as by me.

Mr. Garnier: To follow through his argument, could the hon. Gentleman tell the Committee what the Welsh people have done to offend the Labour party, that they are not allowed a revenue-raising Assembly?

Mr. Canavan: I shall leave it to hon. Members who represent Welsh constituencies to put the case on behalf of their people.

I was saying that the Scottish Parliament will be far more powerful—

Mr. Stunell *rose—*

Mr. Canavan: I think that we are running out of time.

The Scottish Parliament will be far more powerful than any local authority because it will have a budget of about £14 billion per annum. It will also have the power to legislate on matters such as housing and the national health service in Scotland, as well as education, tourism, and aspects of industry and the economy.

If the people of Scotland want to spend an extra 1p or 2p on income tax for a better national health service, or for better educational opportunities for their children, surely that should be their basic democratic right.

[Mr. Canavan]

If the Scottish Parliament had no revenue-raising powers, it would be completely dependent on the revenue-raising powers and votes of this Parliament. It would have no fiscal autonomy or responsibility. So it is not very clever to separate the Parliament from its revenue-raising powers by asking two separate questions on, as I understand it, two separate ballot papers.

I still see no need for a referendum, especially after the mandate that we got from the people of Scotland and Wales at the general election. Even so, a single-question referendum is better than a two-question referendum, so even on the principle of the lesser of two evils, the amendment proposed by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland has considerable merit. It does not exclude specific reference to tax-varying powers, but puts the matter in a single simple proposition, to be determined by the people of Scotland.

Sir Teddy Taylor: For the first time in my parliamentary career, I agree with the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan). I hope that, on reflection, hon. Members will vote for the amendment, because if we do not have that wording, it would be outrageous to propose to the people of Scotland an Assembly without tax-raising powers.

For reasons that hon. Members well know, I oppose the principle of a Scottish Assembly, or Parliament, altogether. However, we can be sure of one thing—that a Parliament without tax-raising powers would be a disaster for Scotland and its people, and for the rest of the United Kingdom.

Bearing in mind the fact that Scotland is a nation in which people are conscious of their aims and objectives, if everything were going wrong in Scotland—all the hospitals and schools did not have enough resources, the road programme was not working, and so on—it would be blamed on the British Parliament in London, despite the fact that the Scottish Parliament would be sitting there. That would simply stoke up the demand for independence and help to break up of the United Kingdom.

I hope that the Government will avoid putting before the people of Scotland what might appear a nice option—a Parliament that will not cost them anything. The second advantage of specifying tax-raising powers would be to remind people that a Scottish Parliament would cost them a great deal of money.

Before the previous referendum, I found that one of the reasons for the move against devolution during the campaign was that people had not previously been aware of the full cost of the operation. It would have included not only the cost of all the new Members of Parliament and their offices, with all the expenses involved, but the substantial additional bureaucracy.

The third advantage of mentioning tax-raising powers is that it would allow a debate on how we support Scotland. I had the privilege many years ago—probably before most hon. Members were born—of being a Minister in the Scottish Office before I had to resign when the Prime Minister signed the treaty of Rome. Every year we had to negotiate a formula or grant whereby we got cash for Scotland. There was then a differential by comparison with England of about 14 per cent.—a substantial amount. People in Scotland are not fully aware of the substantial additional funding they receive.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): Rubbish.

Sir Teddy Taylor: It is not rubbish. I negotiated the figures. I assure the hon. Gentleman that although the nationalists have different views, the plain fact is that there is substantial additional funding.

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Teddy Taylor: My final point will answer the hon. Gentleman's question; I know what it will be. As he was about to propose, the best question for the referendum would be to ask the people of Scotland whether they want to be fully independent. A referendum on devolution could lead to over-government, extra spending and huge waste and uncertainty.

There is no middle way between independence for Scotland and the present situation. Precious few powers are left in the assembly in Westminster. Hon. Members know well that we constantly make speeches about things over which we have no control. Hon. Members shout about the fishing industry when, effectively, all the power has gone. They complain about the cruelty involved in the export of live animals, but their power has gone. If we set up a new, separate Parliament in Scotland, in addition to the county and district councils and this Parliament, it will create a mess of over-government. It would be infinitely better for the people of Scotland if they were not misguided by misleading questions and made up their minds about whether Scotland as a separate nation should be independent. I therefore hope that the House will consider the amendment because it is more realistic, truthful and sensible. Irrespective of the question, I hope that the people of Scotland will have the common sense once again to reject this costly nonsense, which will do no good to them, to Scotland or to the United Kingdom. For the first time in many years, I support the Liberal Democrat amendment.

Mr. Thomas Graham (West Renfrewshire): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that, under the Tories, 4,500 quango members ran Scotland at a cost of nearly £15 billion? Surely it is time for democratic control by elected members.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I will form a popular front with the hon. Gentleman to get rid of quangos and get back to democracy. Sadly, if he looks at the Labour manifesto, he will find that the new Government will create lots of new quangos that will cost more and employ a great deal more bureaucracy. If he and I can work together to fight quangos and support democracy, I will be glad to form a new popular front with him and the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Garnier: Several questions must be asked about this part of the Bill. The questions raised by the hon. Members for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), and by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) are pertinent. It is a pity that the Government have ignored them.

The Government propose to impose pre-legislative referendums on the people of Scotland and Wales. People will be invited to discuss before the referendums many questions to which they will not be provided with answers. What will be the remit of the Scottish Parliament? What will be the constituencies? If it is to be elected by proportional representation, will it use a list system, a partial list system or the additional member system? What will be the pay, conditions and allowances of its Members? My hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East asked what it would cost. When and how often will it sit? What will be its hours? Will it sit one month out of 12 or will it be a full-time body? Will it be a condition of membership that Members of the Scottish Parliament should not also be Members of the United Kingdom Parliament? Will they also be allowed to be Members of the European Parliament? May they be members of district, regional or island councils? Will the tax raised by the Scottish Parliament go to the United Kingdom Treasury? Will it go to some new Scottish Treasury? Or will it go into some other basin into which to pour the largesse of the people of Scotland? Who will pay the tax, as the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) asked? What will happen to the Scottish grant that we have heard so much about? It is not good enough for those on the Treasury Bench to talk about the residence tax for the taxation system; it is a far more complicated matter than that. Will it be examined at any stage during the debate on the referendum?

The only sensible referendum question is that proposed by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, the leader of the Scottish National party, and that is to offer the Scottish people full independence or nothing. If they vote for—

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—[*Mr. Jon Owen Jones.*]

Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That the Lords Message of 20th May relating to a Joint Committee of both Houses to scrutinise delegated legislation be now considered.—[*Mr. Jon Owen Jones.*]

Resolved,

That this House doth concur with the Lords in their Resolution relating to the said Joint Committee.—[*Mr. Jon Owen Jones.*]

Ordered,

That the said committee do meet with any committee appointed by the Lords on Thursday 5th June at half-past Four o'clock.—[*Mr. Jon Owen Jones.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mrs. Ann Taylor relating to Modernisation of House of Commons Procedure not later than one and a half hours after their commencement; and the said Motion may be proceeded with, though opposed, after Ten o'clock.—[*Mr. Jon Owen Jones.*]

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Object.

Bahrain

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jon Owen Jones.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Kelvin): I begin by warmly congratulating the Minister of State his appointment. He will know that I predicted high office for him when I served under him as a humble foot soldier on an obscure Bill in Committee, which was considered in a room along the Committee Corridor some years ago. My hon. Friend has not disappointed me. With his progressive record and his deep and genuine commitment to liberty around the world, he will form part of a Labour Foreign Office which I believe will be a beacon of hope for the powerless and the downtrodden in all countries.

The Government have started in such an inspiring way on the domestic as well as the international scene and nothing that I shall say this evening should be taken by my hon. Friend as any kind of criticism. Rather, I want to probe the way in which the Government intend to practise in their policy towards Bahrain what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary so eloquently preached in the Foreign Office mission statement, which has resounded to this country's credit throughout the world.

I am well aware that no country's foreign policy can afford to be entirely selfless, and the first priority of any Government is the well-being of their own citizens, their own economy and their own strategic interests. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary rightly said, however, we all of us are citizens of the world and misery and turmoil in one place inevitably have consequences for the rest of us.

One such area is Bahrain. Since the emir ordered the suspension of the constitution in August 1975 and closed down the Parliament, extreme instability has enveloped the island, with repression, arbitrary arrests, torture, forceable exile and the shooting down of peaceful demonstrators demanding nothing more than the restoration of their Parliament.

In 1994, a petition signed by more than 25,000 people—Sunni and Shi'ite, men and women, people of the left, right and centre—was to be presented to the emir. One might think that that was routine, but the response of the Bahrain Government was far from routine. The leaders of the popular movement were arrested, as were thousands of others. That was followed by more oppression, more deaths under torture and further exile.

Bahrain became the first country in the world to deport its own citizens and demand that other countries refuse to give them asylum. In January 1995, I met three of that unique class of deportees in the Palace of Westminster, where I hosted a press conference for them. The last person to speak to them as they boarded the plane into exile was a British security agent, who was working under Colonel Ian Henderson: a man at the very heart of the darkness in Bahrain.

No sooner had those deportees arrived in this country than the Bahraini Foreign Minister flew to London to demand—successfully to date—that the three be denied political asylum. I know that the Minister is aware that those interested in human rights in this country and the Bahraini people are watching closely to see the outcome of the claims for asylum by Sheikh Ali Salman, Sheikh

[Mr. George Galloway]

Hamza al-Dairi and Sayed Haidar al-Sitri. My first request is that the Minister draws to the attention of our right hon. Friend the Home Secretary the keen interest that there is in that asylum application and the need for its fair and swift adjudication.

Torture is commonplace in Bahrain—of that there can be no doubt. The Minister's predecessor, the former right hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes, said several times in response to questions from me and other hon. Members that he had raised the issue of the abuse of prisoners with the Bahraini authorities. The United States State Department, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other international human rights organisations have produced veritable mountains of documentary evidence of such abuse and torture.

My hon. Friend the Minister has raised those concerns with the Bahrainis in the past and more recently, but I must ask him an obvious question. If, in the teeth of all that evidence, of international opprobrium and expressions of concern from my hon. Friend and his predecessor, the Bahraini people are still being shot like dogs in the streets by security forces led by British mercenaries and are still being abused on the torture tables in the dungeons of the regime, has not the time come when merely raising concerns is not enough?

Thanks to the new Labour Foreign Office mission statement, we have an opportunity to move beyond mere rhetoric towards practical, internationally co-ordinated measures to bring pressure to bear on persistent and unheeding offenders against basic human rights, of whom Bahrain is undoubtedly one.

It is clear that the Bahraini dictatorship is nervous about the Foreign Secretary's mission statement. That can be measured by the intensification of contacts sought by the Bahrainis. It will not have escaped my hon. Friend's notice that the very first visitor from the Arabian Gulf to arrive on his doorstep was the Bahraini Minister of Transport. Nor will he have missed seeing in the respected Arabic daily *Al-Hayat* the photograph of the son of the crown prince, grandson of the emir—it is not so much a one-party state, more a family business—with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence at their meeting last week. The report has the Bahraini Minister reviewing the deep relations between this country and Bahrain, and in particular our security and defence co-operation.

I am sure that I would not be the only person to be grateful if the Minister were to elaborate on the precise security and defence arrangements between our two countries. How deep are they, and how are they affected by the arrogant refusal of the Bahraini dictators to listen to their friends in Britain? I am not alone in wanting to know what safeguards have been built into that co-operation to ensure that no equipment, no training and no British personnel are used in any way against the civilian population of Bahrain. After all, even the previous Government, whose mission statement was deafening in its silence about human rights, had very clear safeguards on the sale of Hawk trainer aircraft to the Indonesian Government.

I am not asking for the cancellation of British-Bahraini defence co-operation; nor, for that matter, are the leaders of the Bahrain opposition in London, one of whose distinguishing characteristics is their moderation. However, despite their moderate and peaceful character, it has been brought to my attention and, I suspect, to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister that the movements of the London-based opposition are now being monitored by agents of the regime. I therefore ask my hon. Friend to take this opportunity to assure the House of the Government's commitment to the well-being of those opposition leaders while they are here in exile.

The Bahraini opposition are not asking for a change of government in Bahrain; they are not asking for the overthrow of the emir; they are not asking to form a Government in Bahrain; they are not even asking for full Westminster-style parliamentary democracy. All that they are asking is for the emir to restore the Bahraini constitution that he suspended in 1975.

My next request to my hon. Friend the Minister is that he place clearly on record this evening that it is the wish of Her Majesty's Government—Her Majesty's Labour Government—that the suspended constitution be reinstated in Bahrain. I believe that, as an interim measure, we should impress on the regime the urgent need to begin dialogue with the opposition. The political leaders must be released, in particular Sheikh Al-Jumri, without whom no such dialogue could possibly be achieved. I believe that my hon. Friend should cause our ambassador in Bahrain himself to meet the opposition, both as a sign of our support for human rights and constitutional government and to send a clear message to the Bahraini Government that we mean business when we raise our concerns with them.

There is ample precedent. In dictatorships all over the world, past and present, our officials maintain regular contact and dialogue—if only for information purposes—with those who are struggling for basic human rights in their own countries. What reason would there be for not doing the same in Bahrain?

Yesterday, while preparing for the debate, I had the doubtful—because distressing—privilege of a visit from one of the victims of the repression to my office in Westminster. I shall call him Mohammed. He is 19 years old, and in another time or another place he would have been a normal young student. In my office, he took off his shirt to display a body hideously pock-marked by gunshot. All over his back and down his left arm, pieces of shrapnel nestled under his agonised skin. What was his crime? To be in a demonstration by school students who were protesting at the emir's refusal to receive the petition that I mentioned earlier.

Mohammed, however, is merely one in thousands. More than 5,000 people on that tiny island have been detained just in the past three years, and at least 1,500 such detainees remain in gaol without trial, undergoing or fearing torture. Many are held under the infamous state security law, which empowers the Minister of the Interior to order the detention of political suspects for up to three years without charge.

Such trials as have been held are frequently taken by the state security court, often in camera. In those trials, evidence usually rests solely on confessions extracted from defendants under torture. No appeal is allowed against its rulings, and, more important, death sentences passed by the court are subject to no appeal.

The Bahraini Government promised the last British Government that they would cease to use the state security court for such trials. They have broken that promise,

and continue to use the SSC to date. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister agrees that Bahrain's state security court is an affront to all international norms of justice, and should be suspended immediately.

According to a report in *The Guardian* on 13 May, a detainee was tortured in Bahrain in a dungeon fitted with British-supplied torture equipment. Have the Government had time to investigate that allegation, and if not, will my hon. Friend undertake to do so? If it transpires that that torture equipment originated in this country will the Minister refer the matter to the Attorney-General with a view to prosecuting the British companies that are involved?

The Bahraini Government refuse all requests by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch for permission to visit Bahrain and investigate reports of the ill-treatment of detainees. I am sure that the Minister will join me in demanding that reputable and respected human rights organisations should be allowed access to Bahrain.

I said that I would return to the person who is at the heart of the darkness of the Bahraini regime. I am sad to say that he is a British citizen and sadder still to say that he is a Scotsman, Colonel Ian Henderson. Henderson might have walked from the fevered pages of a Graham Greene novel. He was an interrogator of the Mau Mau during colonial rule in Kenya in the bitter struggle for independence. So brutally efficient were his methods that, on obtaining independence for Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta tried to re-engage him in his own security apparatus. So notorious was Henderson that a demonstration was mounted by his victims and the whole affair became so scandalous that Kenyatta was forced to deport him. Via Ian Smith's Rhodesia, he ended up as the right hand man of the Al-Khalifa.

In the Gulf, Henderson is known as the butcher of Bahrain. He is the head of the security services and director of intelligence and has gathered around him the kind of British dogs of war, mercenaries, whose guns and electric shock equipment are for hire to anyone who will pay the price.

It has been commonplace for previous Ministers to brush off criticism of Henderson with the claim that they have no responsibility for his actions, but I do not think that that is entirely true. After all, the House rightly made it possible to pursue, try and punish the British sex tourists who pollute the Philippines and Thailand with their paedophile proclivities. How much more have we responsibility similarly to pursue people who torture and murder for money and who carry Her Majesty's passports?

The House rightly made it possible to try people in this country for war crimes that had been committed in Ukraine or Belorussia more than 50 years ago. I have legal advice which says that the United Nations convention against torture places an obligation on Britain to arrest or attempt to extradite Henderson. Lord Avebury said in another place that, should Henderson return here, having eaten his fill at the trough of the dictatorship, he will face a battery of civil actions for damages from victims of his crimes.

That is not enough. Ian Henderson is Britain's Klaus Barbie. The European Parliament has called Britain to prosecute Henderson and there is another fundamental point that cannot be gainsaid about Henderson's provenance. Britain's relations with the island of Bahrain have been warm, close and special for 150 years. Ian Henderson was appointed as deputy director of security on the island in 1966, which was five years before the British left and the territory became independent. Therefore, he was appointed by a British Government, I regret to say by a British Labour Government, to his position in the secret state apparatus of Bahrain.

Of course, the Minister would be right to say that Ian Henderson is not an employee of ours and has nothing to do with us. That is true up to a point, but the Minister must know that that is not how it looks to the man on the torture table looking up at Henderson. It is not how it looks to the demonstrators who are falling in the streets in a hail of gunfire that is directed by him, and it is not how it looks to the wailing families as they bury their dead, people who have been killed by Henderson's forces for the crime of demanding democratic reform.

We as a people have a clear duty to repudiate the conduct of one of our citizens in the service of a foreign power who stands condemned of crimes against humanity. I hope that I have done enough in the debate to make the case that, while of course we must continue to do business with Bahrain and engage constructively in the process of offering its people help and assistance to build out of that autocracy, it cannot be business on the same basis as before. The Bahraini Government must know that Britain now has a Minister and a Government who mean what they say and say what they mean, a Government who really believe in human rights and democracy.

10.19 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) on introducing this short but important debate on human rights and the specific question of Bahrain. His interest not just in Bahrain but in the broader topic of human rights is well known. He has raised some specific issues. If my hon. Friend is agreeable to this, I should like to make a few general points about human rights, deal with his specific questions and, I hope, sum up by talking about our approach to Bahrain in the future.

There has been much interest in the House and elsewhere on the issue of human rights. My hon. Friend is right to point out that on a number of occasions, both in written and oral questions, I have raised my concerns about the human rights regime in Bahrain. I did that in opposition and it is natural and important that what we have said in opposition should colour and shape our policies in government. Let me therefore give the first commitment to my hon. Friend: there will be continuity in terms of the values and approach that we adopt.

I remind my hon. Friend that in his speech on 12 May my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made it clear that this Government value an ethical dimension in their foreign policy and that we shall give substantial priority to human rights and try to pursue that agenda through international forums, bilateral relationships and other means available to us.

In relation specifically to Bahrain, I have already had the opportunity to meet the Bahraini ambassador. My hon. Friend referred to one or two items already in my diary and I suspect that he may have some predictions as to future meetings. I took the opportunity of that meeting to raise our concern about human rights. I stressed a number

[Mr. Derek Fatchett]

of issues. Our discussion was frank and the atmosphere was one in which it was possible for me to engage in a constructive dialogue, which I was keen to do.

I welcomed recent visits to Bahrain by representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, but I also strongly emphasised to the Bahraini ambassador that transparency in human rights is crucial. I emphasised the need for Amnesty International or any similar organisation to be involved in monitoring the situation closely. I shall continue to take up that commitment and I have suggested to the ambassador that it might be a sensible approach for him and his Government to get in touch with Amnesty International.

I give a clear commitment to my hon. Friend and to others who have taken a keen interest in the matter that when we feel that there is a need to address these issues with the Bahraini authorities we shall not hesitate to do so constructively. I will talk about our overall approach in relation to human rights, but I can say to my hon. Friend that our commitments are clear and our style and approach will be clear, not just on this issue, but on others as well.

Last week, when I was in the middle east, I was asked about the Government's approach to human rights. I said at that stage that our approach would not be à la carte: it is a universal principle that we are trying to promote and we will promote it in each case and take each opportunity.

May I raise one issue that I thought my hon. Friend might raise and did not? As he knows, there has been much publicity with regard to the treatment received by Sheikh Abdul Amir Al Jamri, a senior Shia cleric and spiritual leader who has remained in detention in Bahrain since January 1996. The Government of Bahrain have always stated that allegations such as those about the lack of family visits and the sheikh's maltreatment were unfounded. In my recent meetings with the Bahraini ambassador, I addressed that question. I have been assured that Al Jamri was in good health, that there was access to medical attention whenever he needed it and that he was visited by his family on a regular basis. This is an area on which I pressed for openness and transparency because the best way for the Bahraini authorities to remove fears about Al Jamri and others is to have independent international monitoring of the human rights regime. Amnesty International or any other organisation with a similar reputation could play a valuable part in that.

My hon. Friend raised some important specific issues and I shall try to address the six main points raised in his speech.

I can assure my hon. Friend that the asylum applications are under consideration. Naturally, they are confidential between the parties concerned. In the circumstances, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the details, but I will ensure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is aware of the views expressed by my hon. Friend.

There was also the question whether defence equipment exports would be used in internal repression in Bahrain. I remind the House that on 22 May my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced the initiation of an urgent review of the detailed criteria used in licence applications for the export of conventional weapons. New criteria will be made available to the House as soon as that review is completed. We will then look closely at any evidence that British companies within our jurisdiction may be involved in supplying materials or expertise for the purposes of torture or any other human rights violations. I give my hon. Friend that clear commitment.

That clear commitment applies also to the points that my hon. Friend made about the article in *The Guardian* on 13 May. He will appreciate that I am not in a position to comment on the specific allegations, simply because we do not have the material on those allegations. However, if my hon. Friend or anyone else is able to provide that material, we will look into the points made. We shall certainly investigate the matter further on the basis of the article in *The Guardian*. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall be writing to him in the near future with our response to the points made.

My hon. Friend also raised the question of the safety of Bahraini exiles in the United Kingdom. Over the past year or so, I have had the opportunity to meet some of the Bahraini exiles and some of those leading the Bahraini opposition. I share my hon. Friend's view that those responsible for the opposition in this country are moderate people with a moderate set of demands. Therefore, we would be concerned about the safety of any individual exile. We would view with the utmost concern any suggestion of a specific threat against anyone in the United Kingdom. Where specific complaints are brought to our attention or to the attention of any hon. Member, we will investigate them further. If there is any specific evidence in that respect, we will pursue the matter. We will give the utmost priority to the safety of those in exile here.

My hon. Friend referred to the state security court. One of the points that we have already stressed and will continue to stress to the Bahraini authorities is the need for due process of law in all criminal cases. That is an important element in any human rights regime and we shall continue to make that argument.

My hon. Friend referred in some detail to the case of Mr. Ian Henderson and made a number of disturbing allegations in relation to the activities of Mr. Henderson. If those allegations are true, they would be viewed with great concern and dismay by Her Majesty's Government. My hon. Friend talked about the possibility of legal action being taken against Mr. Henderson on his return. That is a matter for others. However, I wish to make it clear that the Government would take a strong negative view of any action along the lines suggested in relation to Mr. Henderson. We deplore those actions if the allegations are true.

In the two minutes remaining to me, I want to consider Bahrain and the human rights points raised by my hon. Friend within the context of a more general view of the Government's principles and the way in which we intend to promote human rights.

This country is entering a new period of foreign policy. Wherever I have travelled, and with whomsoever I have engaged in debate, there has been a tremendous interest in the Foreign Secretary's remark that there should be an ethical dimension to foreign policy. That involves important tactical questions about how we pursue that

ethical dimension. In the vast majority of cases, we will strive for a constructive engagement. We will do that with Bahrain. Putting it crudely, there are sticks and carrots and there are difficult tactical choices to be made. We will engage with Bahrain over a range of commercial, political and regional issues. That was the policy of the previous Government and we intend to continue it. Within that framework of engagement, we are keen to ensure that, as an important agenda item, there will be discussion of human rights.

We have had a short but important debate tonight. It has been the first opportunity for this Government to talk about the new ethical dimension in foreign policy. I hope that my hon. Friend will see that there is a difference and that there are changes. I have attempted, in a way that I have not always noticed in Adjournment debates, to answer the specific questions raised—

Mr. Galloway: It has never happened before.

Mr. Fatchett: Indeed, it may never have happened before. I hope that, in that sense, I have set two precedents—the moral dimension to foreign policy and answering questions in an Adjournment debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 4 June 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

DTI Inquiries

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I am grateful for the opportunity to draw the attention of the House to Department of Trade and Industry inspectors' inquiries. I have applied for this debate every week since the new year because I think that it is high time that something was done to ensure that DTI inquiries are conducted in a way that allows those being investigated the same protection they would be given in a court of law. That is not the situation now.

Inspectors appointed under the Companies Act 1985 can ignore the presumption of innocence. They are able to pursue their inquiries by means that are manifestly unfair, as successive Law Lords, learned review bodies and distinguished commentators have repeatedly warned. Changes are long overdue. I hope that the House will today press the Minister, whom I congratulate on his arrival at the Dispatch Box, to revise DTI inquiry procedures so that the potential for abuse and unfairness is eliminated. Too often in the past, Parliament has been left uninformed about the progress of such inquiries and, too often, the progress has been wayward.

Nobody would dispute the importance of tackling and prosecuting commercial fraud. Regrettably, business crime is a fact of life. In multinational operations with increasingly complex technology, the need for sophisticated monitoring and effective regulation has never been more important. Small investors and major institutional shareholders alike need safeguards against corrupt or careless practitioners. In a competitive world, confidence in the City of London depends on a reputation for straight dealing and vigilant control. It is equally necessary that every part of the regulatory framework, including the conduct of DTI inquiries, should be handled with complete integrity.

I should make it clear that I am not deterred from delving into the performance of the past Administration. Nobody could be prouder than I am of the Conservative record over the past 18 years, but I am aware that mistakes occur in the best-run organisations and they must be sorted out if progress is to be made. If I were content with fudge and self-deception, I would not have made a stand over the threat to our border controls in the previous Parliament.

For the avoidance of doubt, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your arrival in the Chair and I am delighted to see you there—I hope that the House will accept that nothing in what I say today about former Ministers should be construed as an attack on any colleague. In the context of this debate, I am not in the slightest interested in the present ambitions of some colleagues. My concern, first and last, is with unsatisfactory procedures in DTI inquiries. I shall not flinch from telling the facts as I know them. My object is to put right what I consider to be some obvious wrongs.

I wish to make my position clear because persistent press inquiries in the past few days about this debate have related to the Conservative leadership contest. I have repeated time and again to journalists that I was seeking the debate months before the leadership contest was even contemplated, but the speculation has intensified to the point where it is in danger of trivialising the serious issue of DTI inquiries I wish to raise.

I have also told those journalists loud and clear that there is something far more controversial in what I shall have to say than mere gossip about colleagues' leadership chances. That is because having looked back at the vitriolic and unscrupulous warfare between Tiny Rowland and Mohamed Al Fayed, I have come to the fairly dramatic conclusion that the Al Fayeds were stitched up by a DTI inquiry.

I am only too well aware that the Al Fayeds fight with no holds barred and resort to mud-slinging at the drop of a hat. For two years, they made in the press totally false allegations about me concerning a nationality application. I do not doubt that they have often embellished the truth and made an art form of exaggeration. I can understand the general distaste for their unprincipled and unsavoury use of brown envelopes and other inducements as bait for greedy and corrupt minor public figures and hangers-on.

Yet injustice is injustice, no matter how controversial the characters on the receiving end may be. I like to think that the House would agree that an abuse of DTI inquiry procedures cannot be condoned simply because the subject of the inquiry has behaved reprehensibly in other ways.

Two inquiries launched a decade ago—Guinness and House of Fraser—involved people who still seek redress for the damage inflicted on them by the inquiries. When the House of Fraser report was published in 1990, in positively bizarre circumstances, my first reaction, like that of former right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House, including Peter Shore, Sir David Steel, Sir Kenneth Warren and my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir P. Tapsell), whom I see in his place, was to criticise the subjects of the inquiry and question the takeover.

When further information came to my attention some time later, I was prompted to revisit the report and question my earlier assumptions. I felt that the Trade and Industry Select Committee's deliberations in 1990 had not reached the heart of the matter and, as I dug deeper into the events of 1985 to 1987, I changed my mind about the earlier presumption of guilt. I was struck by numerous inconsistencies in the report and the reasons for launching the inquiry in the first place—all of which, in my opinion, amounted to an abuse of proper procedures.

I wish to declare relevant past employment and acquaintance with people to whom I shall refer in the debate. Concerning the Guinness inquiry, I met Lord Spens in 1969—28 years ago—when we both worked in the corporate finance department of Morgan Grenfell.

[Mr. Charles Wardle]

During the 1970s, when I ran a manufacturing group, Lord Spens advised me on a number of takeovers. He has recently briefed me on his claim against the Bank of England in the High Court.

With regard to the House of Fraser inquiry, I worked from 1988 to 1992 as a consultant to KPMG, the accountants, one of whose corporate clients I had been for several years previously. KPMG accountants were auditors to both Lonrho and House of Fraser, as well as personal accountants to advisers to the Al Fayeds and the Sultan of Brunei. At no stage did KPMG divulge anything to me about Lonrho, House of Fraser or, for that matter, any other client.

I have met Mohamed Al Fayed on one occasion, in the office of his solicitors last year, when I gave him the unedited version of a letter of mine that was published in *The Daily Telegraph*. He gave me a letter retracting a number of unfounded accusations that he had levelled against me in the press over the previous two years. There has been absolutely no input from Mohamed Al Fayed and his advisers in what I have to say and they have had no prior knowledge whatever of the content of this speech.

I have been a Minister in the Home Office and the DTI. One sequence of events in the Home Office is relevant to the debate. In January 1994, while I was the Minister responsible for immigration and nationality, I was asked to find a way of reversing a decision by nationality division officials to reject the British citizenship application by Ali Fayed. I had already accepted the decision of officials. I explained that the provisions of the British Nationality Act 1981 require officials to carry out character checks on applicants. In doing so, they could not disregard highly adverse criticism in a report published by another Department.

When I was instructed to pursue further references that might be favourable to Ali Fayed, I explained that, short of striking out the DTI report, it would still remain an insuperable obstacle for officials in the course of their statutory duties. Nevertheless, I conveyed the instructions to my private office and further inquiries were made. By the time they were completed, I had moved to another Department, but my successor, the late Sir Nicholas Baker, was left with no alternative but the one that I had originally accepted from officials.

Subsequently, there was intensive briefing of the press about the incident, and I am indebted to officials from two Departments for keeping me informed about it. On one occasion, I had to summon the permanent secretary from the Home Office to correct factual inaccuracies in a press statement that was about to be released. There is nothing further that I wish to add about that chapter of events. Perhaps the intervention was due to an incomplete knowledge of British nationality legislation.

I should like to make some general comments about the role of DTI inspectors—I hope that they will be of interest to the Minister—before I turn to two specific case study examples. In the debate on 16 February 1994 in another place, their lordships accepted that DTI guidelines for inspectors tried to strike a balance between public advantage and private rights, but expressed concern that, in practice, the inquiries were inquisitorial. What Lord Denning had said 30 years ago in the Profumo inquiry, when he described his own role as

"detective, inquisitor, advocate and judge . . . which must give rise to a serious risk of much unfairness"

applies equally to DTI inquiries today.

The Solomon commission stated in 1966 that the inquisitorial procedure is alien to the concept of justice in the United Kingdom, but that has not deterred successive DTI inspectors. In September 1974, Lord Fletcher said that inquiries are

"not merely an unsatisfactory method of ascertaining truth . . . they can reflect adversely on the reputation of individuals and can be particularly damaging because they are promulgated by the government and assumed to the result of a judicial or semi-judicial investigation".

In 1980, the law reform committee of the Senate of the Inns of Court of England and Wales said that inspectors were

"unable to resist passing judgements which they are not really qualified to make".

All too often, inspectors, whose duty is ostensibly to establish facts, attack individuals who have no means of answering back.

The DTI's guidelines for inspectors quote Lord Justice Sachs, who said:

"The inspectors' function is in essence to conduct an investigation designed to discover whether there are facts which may result in others taking action; it is not part of their function to take a decision as to whether action be taken and a fortiori it is not for them finally to determine such issues as may emerge if some action is taken eventually".

That advice has been disregarded.

In DTI inquiries, the British presumption that a person is innocent until proven guilty goes out the window. Inquiries are conducted in secret, without defence counsel, without one witness knowing which other witnesses have been called, without hearing what one has said of another and without the right to cross-examine other witnesses or question their motives. There is, as Lord Lester said to general acclaim in another place in February 1994, no safeguard of open justice, no presumed procedures, no rules on inadmissible evidence. Powers are vested in the Secretary of State to decide whether to publish reports, no matter how damaging they may be to individuals, who have no right of appeal or access to the courts to change inspectors' opinions and recover their reputation. That is another feature of concern.

To illustrate that, I turn first to the Guinness inquiry, which was launched on 1 December 1986 following a hostile takeover bid for Distillers by Guinness and by Argyll between January and April that year and which gave rise to numerous media stories and allegations about concert parties, warehousing and other share dealings that contravened the City takeover code and the Companies Act. Inspectors were asked

"to investigate and report on the membership of the company and otherwise with respect to the company for the purpose of determining the true persons who are or have been beneficially interested in the success or failure of the company."

The inspectors' final report has never been published, but in 1989, an unpublished interim report was extensively circulated to defendants in the Guinness trials and, more importantly, to the regulatory bodies. The inspectors' inquiries led to a number of prosecutions and two trials.

In 1990, Guinness trial one resulted in four convictions. The trial has since been declared to be unfair in the European Court of Human Rights as a result of the use of DTI interviews in the trial.

Guinness trial two collapsed, ostensibly because of the breakdown of one defendant's health, but more probably because another defendant, Lord Spens, was about to show the court that the inspectors had quickly departed from the terms of the inquiry and had concentrated instead on a highly selective assault on a limited number of City individuals named in the media. In doing so, the inspectors completely ignored a large number of highly suspect share sales by supporters of the Argyll bid.

Lord Spens was about to claim, with supporting evidence, that the inspectors' early departure from a comprehensive inquiry into all the share dealings to a highly selective examination of certain individuals had been prompted by ministerial interference. The inspectors had been told to pursue selected City individuals rather than investigate all the share transactions, as their terms of reference implied. It was a political decision to go for named individuals from the outset, but no Minister was ever accountable to the House for that decision.

The police were quite deliberately kept out of the investigation for at least four months in order to allow inspectors to take evidence from witnesses for later use in a criminal trial without the constraints of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 coming into play on the witnesses' behalf. Parliament was not told of those tactics either, but, in the preliminary hearing ahead of Guinness trial one, prosecuting counsel admitted as much when he said:

"It will come as no surprise . . . when I say that if Mr. Parnes' transcripts of evidence were not admissible, the prosecution would have to think seriously whether to proceed against him at all".

Lord Denning's good advice 30 years earlier had been totally ignored and nobody told Parliament.

It is on Guinness two and Lord Spens that I shall concentrate here. In his response to the inspectors' interim report, Lord Spens showed that the inspectors failed to carry out anything like a full analysis of the 5,719 transactions in Guinness shares between the opening and closing of bids from January to April 1986. Discovered evidence from the police revealed that only those transactions relating to a few named and well-known City individuals, discussed and identified by Ministers, officials and the Director of Public Prosecutions early in the inspectors' inquiries, were analysed and considered.

Minutes of a meeting between John Wood and Rosalind Wright, of the Crown Prosecution Service, and solicitors acting for Morgan Grenfell reveal that Mr. Wood said:

"If other MG involvements in other share ramping came to light the DPP would be criticised for not having prosecuted Morgan Grenfell and someone else might take out a private summons. But we want to target the principal offenders. We don't want rows and rows of defendants. We are looking at major offenders as understood by the media."

So much for the official public version that the inspectors would examine the whole Guinness episode as their terms of reference implied. The hidden agenda was to nail the major offenders as understood by the media. An inquisition, prefaced by ministerial claims to the press ahead of the general election that handcuffs must be put on Guinness offenders, had picked out its prey. The inquiry was a sham of ill-informed questions about little-understood market dealings put to only some of the participants about only some of the share transactions.

On 8 January 1987, the Bank of England's Board of Banking Supervision, which included among its members the Governor and the Deputy Governor, concluded that "at this stage" it was not appropriate for Lord Spens to be dismissed from his job. Within less than three weeks, however, the Governor and the Deputy Governor swung to the opposite point of view. Suddenly, they felt it was not merely appropriate but urgently necessary to dismiss Lord Spens. Why? Not, as his trial subsequently showed, because the inspectors had uncovered fresh evidence against him, but because the DTI let the Bank of England know that there was a political imperative that City heads should roll—and soon—at the merchant banks identified by the media as embroiled in the Guinness affair.

There are records of a meeting in the second week of January 1987 between the inspectors and the DTI to discuss a letter from Gerald Ronson offering to repay some fees. At that meeting, other matters were discussed. At the beginning of the following week, a note from a senior DTI official was dispatched to the Governor of the Bank of England complaining about the Bank's failure to force the dismissal of any merchant bank directors. The next day, two of the most senior directors of Morgan Grenfell were dismissed on Bank of England instructions and, two days later, Lord Spens was sacked from his job at Ansbacher. Barely a few weeks into the inquiry and long before the inspectors had been able to conduct a full inquiry designed to discover all the facts as DTI guidelines required, it seems that the inspectors and the DTI were pressing on the Bank of England the need to collect some well-known scalps.

The political pressure for scalps did not come just from the DTI. The Chancellor said publicly that the Government wanted decisive action over the Guinness affair. On 20 January, he told the House that the two resignations at Morgan Grenfell were consistent with the Government's call for positive steps. Between 21 and 24 January, the press reported that the Government were exerting pressure to obtain resignations. Thereafter, the inspectors occupied much of their time not fulfilling the terms of their inquiry, but seeking to justify the scalps for which Ministers had pressed. In Guinness two, it all came unstuck in court.

No attempt was made by the inspectors to look through the rest of the transactions. During the DTI investigation, it came to the notice of the inspectors, as a result of powerful evidence supplied by the chief executive of Montagu Investment Management—an associate of Argyll and a major fund investment company—that it had sold 4.5 million Guinness shares short in the market in the last 10 days of the bid, driving down the Guinness share price. That was more than double the size of the Ansbacher purchase for which Lord Spens was arrested, charged, prosecuted and then acquitted, but the Montagu Investment Management short sale was dismissed by the inspectors in an eight-line footnote to their interim report, completely ignoring the fact that they had been made aware of allegations of an unlawful indemnity on that short sale. Montagu Investment Management even shared a computer with Samuel Montagu and must, by any definition that the City has ever entertained, have been acting in concert.

Why was that short sale ignored? Lord Spens argues that it was because Montagu Investment Management was not on the hit list, whereas he was. The inspectors spoke to no other employee of Ansbacher besides Lord Spens,

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not even the securities clerk whom the inspectors had been told had been responsible for faxing a crucial letter from Lord Spens at a time when he was out of the bank.

In summary, the inspectors failed to analyse all the Guinness share transactions; failed to include any mention of the Montagu Investment Management indemnity allegations in their interim report; failed to interview anyone else from Ansbacher, any market marker or jobber in the City or any representative of the City Takeover Panel; failed to analyse the problems caused by the stock exchange's own definition of a false market compiled by a jobber practising in the marketplace at the time of the bid; failed to take account of differing views on the disclosure provisions of the City takeover code; and failed to appreciate that core underwriters to the offer, such as Scottish Widows, were also in receipt of success fees and, by the inspectors' own definition, should have disclosed share sales. They also failed to involve the police and thus allow witnesses the protection of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 at a sufficiently early stage in their inquiries.

If, as Lord Spens claims, the interim report was discussed extensively with Ministers, officials and the DPP, its shortcomings are all the more disturbing. The suspicion must remain that Lord Spens, a highly successful if, at times, unorthodox and aggressive City player, was to be made an example of during the run-up to a general election, but the case against him collapsed and he was acquitted.

The loose ends of the Guinness inquiry should now be subjected to a rigorous examination by the Minister and a report should be made to Parliament. The Bank of England, or perhaps the regulatory arm that is to be hived off to the Securities and Investments Board, should now offer to settle Lord Spens's court action for wrongful dismissal from Ansbacher and his exclusion for more than a decade from his rightful employment as a merchant banker.

I now turn to the House of Fraser inquiry which was astonishing for the manner in which it was commissioned in 1987; for the line of inquiry that the inspectors subsequently chose to pursue, which bore little relationship to the basis on which the bid had originally been cleared by the Secretary of State in 1985; and, not least, for the way in which the inspectors' report came to be published. New light has been thrown on the events leading to the appointment of the inspectors and the conduct of the inquiry by the publication of a biography of Tiny Rowland by Tom Bower, the investigative journalist. Bower contends that Rowland

"embarked upon a hunt which was frenetic, erratic, costly and occasionally illegal . . . to prove a conspiracy".

The conspiracy was that Mohamed Al Fayed, lying about his past, had used the Sultan of Brunei's fortune to buy the House of Fraser, with the collusion of senior Government Ministers. Bower also contends that Rowland's efforts led directly to the appointment of inspectors and provided much of the evidence, directly or indirectly, that they subsequently considered.

On 11 March 1985, Mohamed Al Fayed and his two brothers had acquired a controlling interest in House of Fraser in the stock market and prepared to bid for the balance of the shares. On the same day, Mohamed Al Fayed had been interviewed at the Office of Fair Trading, and Sir Gordon Borrie had advised the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that there were no grounds for a referral of the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Sir Gordon's deputy at the OFT had listened to the Al Fayeds and their City advisers telling of their wealth and background, but Sir Gordon had advised the Secretary of State that their background was irrelevant. He said:

"It's a cash bid and as long as the shareholders receive their money the OFT has no further interest".

Nevertheless, the Secretary of State wished to speak to the Al Fayeds himself and he received similar assurances of substantial wealth at a meeting on 12 March, which he sought to verify by telephoning the chairman of Kleinwort Benson. Later, the Secretary of State was to respond exactly as the Director General of Fair Trading had done:

"I didn't care who owned Harrods or House of Fraser. I was only interested in takeovers on competition grounds and there was no competition element involved".

He also said:

"What does it matter who brings in the money providing it's brought in?"

The Al Fayeds were already known to the Government because they had made helpful representations that persuaded the Sultan of Brunei to retain large currency deposits in sterling that helped the strength of the pound. In January 1985, Mohamed Al Fayed had visited 10 Downing street with the Sultan and, just after he acquired control of House of Fraser, he lunched at No. 10 with the President of Egypt.

The fact that, between March 1985 and the appointment of DTI inspectors in April 1987, the Al Fayeds' relationship with the Government slid from that of favoured investors to wanted suspects was due to just one man and his company—Tiny Rowland and Lonrho. It was Rowland who aspired to own House of Fraser and its star subsidiary, Harrods. It was Rowland who had warehoused his House of Fraser shares with the Al Fayeds, confident that they did not have the money to make a full bid. It was Rowland who was wrong-footed when the Al Fayeds did precisely what he never imagined was possible. It was Rowland, tainted permanently himself by an adverse DTI inspectors' report in the 1970s, who now sought to wreak the same vengeance on the Al Fayeds. Rumours in the media prompted by Rowland and his associates that the Al Fayeds were using the Sultan's money to buy assets in the UK have never been substantiated. Having falsely claimed that he had been prevented from making a counter-bid until it was too late—in fact, Lonrho had been cleared to bid the previous Friday—Rowland and various of his associates kept up a relentless barrage, to which the Al Fayeds replied in kind. The general view of the public—a view to which I subscribe—was that Rowland and the Al Fayeds deserved each other.

I shall not detain the House with a blow-by-blow account of the unprincipled and vicious propaganda war that followed. Three examples will do. A story linking Mark Thatcher, Al Fayed and the Sultan of Brunei was exposed as baseless. A self-styled holy man, the Swami, was paid $5 million by Rowland to give the appearance of authenticating accusations against the Fayeds that also proved false. An allegation of anti-semitism against the Fayeds came to nothing when it became clear that it had been planted in an American newspaper by an associate of Rowland's, without a shred of evidence in support.

That allegation was repeated to a Department of Trade and Industry Minister in a telephone call from the Minister's cousin, Harry Landy—a man who had embezzled millions from the Israel British bank, and had then been employed by Rowland. The Minister has said that he dismissed his cousin's remarks as irrelevant. That is entirely understandable. It is not clear whether officials considered the telephone call a declarable conflict of interest.

What is clear is that nobody, other than the Rowland faction, objected to the bid. There was no obvious reason for doing so. A cash bid had been cleared by the Secretary of State on advice from Sir Gordon Borrie that the sole basis for refusal would have been on competition grounds, and no such grounds existed. The cash to pay the selling shareholders materialised and more cash followed to fund the acquired company's requirements.

Neither that Secretary of State nor his two successors in the job found reason to launch an inquiry. But Tom Bower argues in his book that, as a general election grew closer and Rowland's noisy vendetta against the Government intensified, the next Secretary of State gave way to Lonrho pressure.

In April 1987, inspectors were appointed to

"inquire into the circumstances of the Fayeds' purchase of shares in House of Fraser in 1984 and 1985".

No matter that the Al Fayeds had answered questions at the Office of Fair Trading on the very day in 1985 that they had acquired a controlling interest in the shares; no matter that the then Secretary of State had given the bid an unqualified clearance; no matter that nobody other than the discredited Rowland had objected. The Secretary of State now put the full force of the Government's authority behind an inquiry that quickly degenerated into a farcical and damaging witch hunt.

There is speculation in chapter 12 of Tom Bower's book that the DTI succumbed to an inquiry only after Rowland had taken up Ernest Saunders, the sacked head of Guinness, in April 1987. Bower claims that Rowland then renewed pressure on the Secretary of State, who was a member of the Guinness family.

Other sources suggest that the contingency of appointing inspectors in order to prevent Rowland from becoming a loose cannon in the run-up to the general election had been mooted earlier that year, and was nothing to do with Bower's theories. The whole truth may never be revealed, but the inspectors seem to have been appointed out of sheer expediency.

I have never believed the defamatory stories that surfaced in the press about a Minister and a million pounds in a suitcase. There is no proof of any such wrongdoing, as Sir Gordon Downey confirmed in the fourth report of the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges for 1996-97.

A more plausible explanation is that Ministers and officials, confronted with Rowland's persistent pressure, were anxious to find a legitimate way of sidelining him. The appointment of inspectors was seen by those on the inside as satisfying ministerial ambitions to keep Rowland quiet for a while, at the same time as protecting civil servants from Rowland's threat of an awkward judicial review.

Two things were patently wrong with that proposition. First, Rowland's application for leave to apply for judicial review had already been dismissed three weeks before the inspectors were appointed. Secondly, a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, as Rowland wanted, on the ground that Kleinwort Benson had changed its mind about the Fayeds' financial and business pedigree, was entirely spurious.

When the bid was cleared in 1985, the then Secretary of State, advised by the Director General of Fair Trading, had acted on competition grounds. The Al Fayeds' financial status mattered only to the extent that they could pay the vendor shareholders, and that they had done.

In April 1987, Ministers and officials should have told Rowland unequivocally to get lost. The fact that they did not do so has fuelled accusations of political expediency that bring discredit on a distinguished Administration. The inquiry and report that followed were a downright abuse of the very kind that the DTI's own guidelines for inspectors warn should be avoided.

Because I do not accept that the shift in Kleinwort Benson's assessment of the Fayeds was germane to the principles on which the bid was cleared in the first place, I am not convinced that paragraphs 30 to 37 and 224 to 225, and part of paragraph 259, on the appointment of inspectors, in Sir Gordon Downey's otherwise excellently thorough report, paint the whole picture.

Kleinwort Benson's belated diligence concerning the Al Fayeds' background—which, by the way, appeared only after it had charged its clients a £3 million advisory fee—was due, like so much else in this murky saga, to Rowland's unrelenting hostility towards anyone who had sided with the Fayeds. Kleinwort Benson's second thoughts did not constitute grounds for a reference to the MMC, as Sir Gordon Borrie made clear in 1987; nor were they sufficient to trigger a section 423 inspection.

Sir Gordon Downey's report does not clarify the genesis of the memorandum dated 27 March 1987 from a named official, Mr. Allen, which discussed options for responding to the Lonrho pressure. In my experience, officials tend to put up submissions in response to ministerial requests. Which Ministers prompted Mr. Allen, and to which Minister did he report within the DTI organisation?

In all other respects, I accept Sir Gordon's findings, especially the rest of his conclusions, and I am grateful for the time that he spared me after the publication of his report to discuss the views that I am conveying to the House today.

Once launched, the House of Fraser inquiry became a travesty. The inspectors openly admitted that Rowland's pressure led to their appointment: it was, as they put it,

"a consequence of two years of unrelenting pressure by Lonrho".

However, they promptly contradicted themselves by saying that

"the direct part which Lonrho and Mr. Rowland played was a comparatively small one".

Pull the other one. For the duration of the inquiry, the inspectors were led by the nose by Rowland and his stooges, and no one at the DTI shouted stop.

Inexplicably, the inspectors chose not to interview Lord Tebbit, the Secretary of State who had cleared the bid in 1985. They said:

"We have not taken evidence from the then Secretary of State or from his junior minister".

But they blatantly disputed Lord Tebbit's reasons for clearance on competition grounds, wrongly asserting that

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"representations made by the Fayeds . . . had led the then Secretary of State to allow them to acquire control unimpeded by any inquiry".

Can we square that with the then Secretary of State's own words:

"I didn't care who owned House of Fraser. I was only interested in takeovers on competition grounds"—

or with those of Sir Gordon Borrie:

"The Commission does not exist to punish people for lying. The shareholders got cash"?

It was not the Fayeds' grossly exaggerated claims about their wealth and background that had won them the day in 1985 when the bid was cleared. It was the absence of any objection on competition grounds and the availability of some £615 million of their money.

The inspectors, having set off like bloodhounds to find what clearly they, like Rowland, hoped would be incontrovertible proof that the takeover cash did not belong to the Fayeds, later had to admit grudgingly:

"We are not providing any independent confirmation of the ownership of any shareholding and . . . we were unable to establish how and when the Fayeds came into possession of the very large funds with which they were to buy House of Fraser".

So the inspectors never proved that the money did not belong to the Fayeds, but that did not deter them from taking a swipe in chapter 2 of their report:

"The Fayeds dishonestly represented . . . their wealth . . . and their resources".

Undismayed by those discrepancies, the inspectors ploughed on. They said that at the time of their appointment they had been told

"that an area of particular concern was the validity of the assurances given by the Fayeds in 1985".

That was clearly a departure from the published terms of reference of their inquiry, but the inspectors failed to disclose who gave them that additional steer. We do not know whether it was a Minister or an official, but it enabled the inspectors, as in the Guinness inquiry, to leap clear of their original terms of reference in one bound, without disclosing their intentions to Parliament.

Having failed to throw further light on the provenance of the takeover cash, the inspectors said:

"We were not concerned with simple questions relating to the direct control of the purchase money used to buy House of Fraser. We were concerned by the statements the Fayeds made . . . English law has always frowned on those who obtain valuable benefits from others by dishonest representations".

That was not what the then Secretary of State or Sir Gordon Borrie had said at the time of the bid.

The inspectors embraced with uncritical enthusiasm an offer of help from an Egyptian—the late President Nasser's son-in-law, Dr. Ashraf Marwan, who, at the age of 27, had been Nasser's public relations chief. They approved of him because he had

"a clear understanding of civil administration in Egypt".

The inspectors cast aside doubts arising from the fact that Dr. Marwan had a high regard for Rowland, had done business with him ever since 1971 in places such as Libya, and was in dispute with the Fayeds over an aircraft supplied to the Sultan of Brunei. They even disregarded the published report of an earlier DTI inspector, John Griffiths, dated March 1984, which plainly accused Marwan of lying. Mr. Griffiths said in 1984:

"Dr. Marwan's evidence did not carry to me the ring of truth. I certainly felt I cannot rely upon it as the whole truth . . . he was not frank . . . I found two matters in Dr. Marwan's evidence impossible to believe . . . Dr. Marwan had a closer liaison with Mr. Rowland than he sought to convey to me."

Yet the inspectors conducting the inquiry in question blithely asserted:

"Mr. Marwan played an important role in uncovering the Fayeds".

It seems that much of Dr. Marwan's so-called evidence against the Al Fayeds came in fact from Adnan Kashoggi, the Al Fayeds' disaffected brother-in-law.

What the inspectors undoubtedly did show was that the Al Fayeds had talked up their past business activities and their family background to the point of fantasy or, if one prefers it—and sometimes I do—deceit. But for all their unsavoury faults, they will not have been the first people in public life to have dressed up their origins. Hon. Members need look no further than Parliament itself for examples of politicians who employ a slightly cosmetic touch to their CV. There are many other examples of people in high places who feel sensitive about their beginnings.

The Al Fayeds had at first been welcomed with open arms into the highest strata of British society, but had then been dumped unceremoniously purely because of pressure from Rowland. What should be remembered, however, is that they did come up with the cash for the takeover bid, and nobody—not even the inspectors—has proved that the money was not theirs to spend.

If Lord Young, yet another Secretary of State at the DTI, had had his way, none of this confused and largely irrelevant report—wrongly conceived and clumsily produced—would have seen the light of day. But Rowland's men stole the report from the DTI, and Rowland published it. This meant, by a further irony, that the statutory requirements for character checks in the British Nationality Act 1981 would prevent civil servants from being able to process the Al Fayeds' citizenship applications without taking the report into account. Rowland's skulduggery, having already compromised the DTI in 1987, was therefore going to throw a road block in front of the nationality division of the Home Office when the Al Fayeds applied for British citizenship.

There is only one solution. It is not the one recommended to me in 1994 at the Home Office—that officials might simply turn a blind eye to the report if more favourable references were to be found. Not only would that have been unlawful and have offended the high standards of civil servants at the nationality division of the Home Office, but it would have left the law open for all manner of future abuses of the British Nationality Act. It simply would not have done.

The only way now is for the DTI to re-examine this flawed report, recognise that it was conceived from Rowland's malice out of short-term expedience and conclude that it ought to be struck off the record in the interests of natural justice and the DTI's good name.

As to any future application by the Al Fayeds for British nationality, that is not my concern. I have no idea whether they would make such an application. I have no idea—the House may have its own view—whether their other actions, including offering inducements to individuals, would be regarded as sufficient objection by nationality officials. That is for the Home Office to decide if the case ever comes up.

Throughout this murky saga, a string of mistakes have been made and the best thing to do is to get to the bottom of it and sort out the mistakes. In the best-run organisations, such mistakes occur. It is better to deal with them, rather than allow a string of further abuses to continue and for the truth never to surface.

10.12 am

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I have to tell the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) that I wish to make my remarks entirely about the Guinness affair in which, far from being over-zealous, DTI inspectors appear to have done very little. Certainly, little has been done after the initial burst of the interim report, to which he referred. By the way, the report is not readily available to Members of Parliament because it has never been published.

In case anyone believes that my actions are politically motivated, I should point out that my interest in the affair come from a constituent and friend—although not necessarily a voter for me—Robert Jack. A distinguished Glasgow lawyer until his retirement, he was a professor of mercantile law at Glasgow university and was used by the DTI in the early 1980s on the advisory panel on company law. Between 1987 and 1989, he chaired the review committee on banking services law. He knows a great deal about the world of company law and is a director of the Bank of Scotland.

Mr. Jack's persistence in asking me to raise this matter meant that I asked the previous Government a series of questions and wrote a series of letters to Ministers about why the DTI inspectors never published a report on the Guinness affair. It may be that the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle thinks that Ernest Saunders and his friends and cronies were all very clean in terms of that affair, but most Scottish Members of Parliament at the time felt that the Guinness bid to take over United Distillers—which was not initially considered hostile by United Distillers; it was the Argyll bid that was considered hostile—bore the hallmarks of Thatcherism and the way in which the economy and industry were being run in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. There was ruthlessness, and promises were made which were not kept. The bid was organised in such a way that shareholders were undermined and it was not to the benefit of the work force.

In making the bid, Ernest Saunders made certain promises to the shareholders of United Distillers. He said that the existing chairman of United Distillers would remain. He did not. He promised in shareholder documents that Sir Thomas Risk would become chairman. He did not, and was elbowed aside by Saunders himself. Saunders said that the United Distillers board would remain the same. It did not, and six members had to resign. He said that Guinness would change its name and move its headquarters to Edinburgh. None of that happened.

There were criminal cases and, eventually, Ernest Saunders—having found a cure for Alzheimer's disease that no one else in the world has managed to find—went to the European Court and received his judgment last December. But the real point that I would like my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to answer—unlike previous Ministers—is why on earth, more than 10 years later, the inspectors have never published a report.

Lord Spens was the last to raise the matter, asking the previous Government

"whether the inspectors, appointed in December 1986, to investigate the affairs of Guinness plc have completed their report and, if not, what are the reasons for the delay; and when do the inspectors expect to be in a position to complete their Report."

The then Minister of State, Lord Fraser of Carmylie, replied:

"The inspectors appointed to investigate and report on the affairs of Guinness plc have not yet completed their enquiries which were suspended during the Guinness criminal trials. Following the conclusion of the last of those trials the inspectors are working towards completion of their final report."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 28 January 1997; Vol. 577, c. 88-89.]

The last criminal trial in this country on the matter has been completed for nearly six years. Why on earth have the inspectors still not published a report? In addition, the report should have been published following the European Court decision last December. More importantly, why were the inquiries suspended during the criminal trials? I can understand that it might not have been possible to publish a report while trials were taking place, but to suspend the inquiries is beyond belief.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister tell us whether he has received a report on the matter? If so, will he publish it? The previous Government said that they had not received a report, but gave no promises that when they did, they would publish it. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will tell me whether he has received the report and will make it clear that he intends to publish it.

I want to make a little point about the way in which Mr. Ernest Saunders operated at United Distillers. That company is the proud owner of the famous Landseer painting, "Monarch of the Glen", which stands in the stairwell of its headquarters in Edinburgh. When the incoming chairman, now Lord Macfarlane, took over at Guinness and United Distillers, he had some job persuading Sotheby's that the "Monarch of the Glen" was not for sale. That is how Mr. Ernest Saunders operated. I think that we are entitled to know exactly what happened in the bid.

10.19 am

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): The whole House must be grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle). It will have been a difficult decision on his part to undertake the considerable work that he has obviously done in preparation for his speech today. I say that without making any presumption about the facts of the three matters that he has raised. But one of the two essential roles of the House—the first being our role as a legislature—is to act on behalf of the public as a watchdog over the whole apparatus of our administrative, including quasi-judicial, procedures to ensure that their integrity is safeguarded and that when questions need to be asked they are duly asked, and answers insisted upon, so that the public can have confidence in the openness and integrity of the procedures by which we are governed.

Everyone who knows my hon. Friend will agree that he has acted in the highest traditions of the House in deciding to draw public attention to the three matters that he has laid before us. The first is whether there was improper pressure on him when he was taking a decision as a Minister in a nationality case. I have absolutely no knowledge of any matters relating to that issue, and no comments to make on it.

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The second matter is whether the Department of Trade and Industry inspectors' inquiry into the House of Fraser was properly conducted. Again, I must make it absolutely plain that I have no personal knowledge of that matter, but there is one comment that I would like to make. Merely as a matter of personal interest, I read the report of the inquiry, and it made quite exciting bedside reading—rather more exciting than one is accustomed to receiving from the Department of Trade and Industry, or indeed any other Department of State.

I was struck at the time, as a former merchant banker and corporate financier, by the disproportionate attention paid to the issue of the Al Fayeds' personal wealth. As my hon. Friend pointed out, the issue of the personal wealth of a bidder in a cash bid is relevant only in so far as there may be doubts as to whether he has the means to purchase the shares for which he has tendered. There was never any question about the Al Fayeds duly paying on time and at the price offered.

The other great issue on which the inspectors spent, as I thought, a disproportionate time, was the Al Fayeds' family background. I have not had occasion to look at the document since I read it many years ago, but that still sticks in my mind, as it seemed so surprising. The issue concerned whether the Al Fayeds were the sons of some poor teacher in Alexandria or came from a wealthy Egyptian family.

Again, it seems astonishing that anyone should be concerned with the family background of a bidder in a public bid, except in so far as it related to the ability to pay for any shares for which he was tendering. We have all agreed that there was no link there. The extraordinary implication was that there was some shame attached to being the son of a poor teacher.

I have no knowledge of the Al Fayeds; I have had no business dealings with them, have never met them, and know absolutely nothing about them except what has been published in the media over the years—and we all know that some of that has been extremely lurid.

The other fact that struck me, as a corporate financier, was that the representations in the offer document—the prospectus issued on behalf of the Al Fayeds in connection with the bid—were regarded as a matter that was germane to their reliability. One can have some understanding of why that was the case, but it must be emphasised—as was not done in the report—that responsibility for the accuracy of statements made in an offer document lies with the person who signs it, and that is the bidder's merchant bank adviser.

I have signed prospectuses and listing particulars myself and I am well aware of the substantial responsibility that one has in such circumstances for the accuracy of every statement made, which is why I would always conduct verification meetings, sometimes over several days, with all the various advisers and parties concerned. If someone made a statement in the draft that he had, say, the highest market share for widgets in California, I would ask how he knew that and how the statement could be verified, and I would not accept that it should be included in the offer document unless I was persuaded that it had been properly justified.

Therefore, if there is criticism about statements that were untrue—whether about the essential issues in the financial decision that would have to be made by shareholders or even about peripheral issues, such as the family background of the parties involved—it should be directed at the merchant bank concerned and in particular at the director who signed the relevant documents. As I recall the inspectors' report, responsibility was not laid where it should have been.

The third matter is the Guinness bid for the Distillers company. I must say at once that I do have personal knowledge of the matter and of many, indeed all, of the principal players involved. At the relevant time, I was a director of Morgan Grenfell, the merchant banking adviser to the bidder, Guinness plc. Morgan Grenfell is now a subsidiary of the Deutsche bank, but was then an independent British bank.

I had absolutely no personal involvement in the transaction, which was being handled by a colleague, but I remember that at our morning meetings throughout the spring of 1987 statements were made about how many Distillers shares we had purchased and what the Guinness share price was. Unlike the House of Fraser bid, this was an exchange offer rather than a cash bid, so the price of the bidder's shares was of the essence in determining whether it would succeed.

The stock exchange was extremely buoyant at the time, but I remember thinking that we seemed to be extremely lucky in the support that we were receiving from around the world for our client's shares. Frankly, it never dawned on me or on any of my colleagues, who are people of the greatest professionalism and honesty, or indeed on anyone in the City, including the stock exchange and the regulators and others who monitor such matters, that that strong share price was not simply fortuitous or the result of objective assessments around the world of the potential attractions of Guinness, but was engineered by a co-ordinated share support operation.

My main point of substance here is that it would probably never have dawned on anybody, other than those who were a party to the illegal share support operation, that anything untoward was going on, had it not been for the fact that in the United States the various regulatory authorities, the Justice Department, the Attorney-General's office in New York state and the Securities and Exchange Commission were conducting an investigation into insider dealing on Wall street, which resulted originally from the Levine affair.

The United States authorities make much more imaginative and better use of plea bargaining than we ever have in Britain. Through the Levine affair, they succeeded in breaking into a much more important insider dealing ring run by Boesky; through plea bargaining with him, they succeeded in convicting the biggest insider dealer of all time, Milken. It was not until Boesky did his deal with the American regulatory and investigative authorities that anything came to light. As part of his plea bargain, he was committed to revealing all his insider deals. So far as I know, he did so, but who knows whether he finally made a comprehensive confession? One of the important deals in which he had been involved that he revealed was the Guinness insider dealing operation. It was at that point that our authorities were alerted and investigations began in Britain.

I recall very well the first that I and my colleagues knew of the matter. At 9 am on 1 December 1986, DTI inspectors arrived at my firm, seized documents and began their investigations. A few weeks later, the director

responsible for the Guinness transaction, Mr. Seelig, was required to resign at an emergency board meeting held that day. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle said, it was not until a month or so later, at the end of January, that to our great amazement, the chairman of our holdings board, Lord Catto, was summoned to the Bank of England and told that the chairman of the bank, Christopher Reeves, and Mr. Graham Walsh, the head of the corporate finance department, must immediately leave the firm or we would be deprived of our accepting house status. That, of course, led to another emergency board meeting where the head of our treasury operations said that we should suffer distinctly in the markets if we lost accepting house status. There was no practical alternative to agreeing to the demands made of us by the Bank of England.

Mr. Maxton: Given the hon. Gentleman's experience of the investment world and his story about how the Guinness affair came to light, will he comment on the difference between self-regulation in Britain and Government regulation in the United States?

Mr. Davies: No, because while that is an important subject, it cannot be properly fitted into the speech that I intend to make this morning, which will be limited to the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle. I have dealt with the matter that the hon. Gentleman has raised in many contexts, including that of the Treasury Committee.

We were all surprised in January 1987 when the Bank of England suddenly demanded the resignation of Mr. Reeves and Mr. Walsh. My understanding from the report put to us by Lord Catto was that there had been much concern in Government circles. The implication was that Whitehall may have had a role in the decision. But the impression we were given was that the Bank of England had not resisted any pressure that might have come from this end of town. In any case, we decided that we had no alternative but to accede to the demands made of us. During that day, Mr. Reeves and Mr. Walsh left the firm.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle said, elsewhere in the City over the next few days as a result of similar initiatives of which I have no direct knowledge, other people left their firms, including Lord Spens, whom I know personally. He had been a colleague when he was a director at Morgan Grenfell. I did one major transaction with him after he went to Ansbacher which was not related in any way to any of the matters under discussion this morning. I have not seen him for many years; I do not think that I have seen him since I have been in the House.

I felt it necessary to make that personal statement to corroborate, so far as I can, in one small particular at least, part of the story that my hon. Friend set out. I want to draw one clear conclusion from what I have said, which I believe follows from the whole of this debate. We live in a democracy; we are proud of living in an open society. We live in a country that has always been well governed by international standards, and I trust that it will remain so. We must have confidence in the integrity, honesty and openness of all our procedures.

It follows that I must disagree with my hon. Friend, who at one point appeared to regret that the DTI inspectors' report into the House of Fraser, which had had an impact on decisions taken in relation to that bid, had been published. When a decision is taken that impacts on the freedom of individuals—in this case the right of shareholders to accept a higher offer for their shares—or the freedom of any of our citizens to conduct his or her business in the way that he or she thinks fit, it is right that the grounds for such a decision should be made public. Irrespective of whether the procedures of the DTI inspectors investigating the House of Fraser matter were flawed—they may have been; I have no comment on the merits of the arguments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle—the report should have been published. It should have been open and available so that we could question any flaws in the report or in the procedures of the inspectors who produced it and so that we could have seen the relation between the report and the decision subsequently taken by Ministers or others that affected the conduct of the bid or the rights and property of individuals.

Equally, in the case of Guinness, it is wrong that after 10 years we still have not seen the report of the DTI inspectors. I have not seen it. As far as I know, none of my fellow directors at Morgan Grenfell has seen it; and nor has anyone else. Some of those involved in subsequent legal actions may have seen part of it. That is not satisfactory. In my days in the financial markets—this is still very much the case—we were trained to be suspicious of anything that looked like a false market, anything that looked like a market in which information was not openly available to everyone who was taking decisions and who was involved in that market. Similarly, in politics there are great dangers in decisions being taken on the basis of information that is available only to some of the parties or to those taking decisions. Others cannot then understand the basis of decisions, which may be arbitrary or unfair. We do not know whether they are unfair or arbitrary because we do not know the information on which they were taken.

So far as I know, all the criminal investigations that arose from the conduct of the Guinness bid for Distillers have been concluded. It is time that the report and all relevant information was published. I know this is controversial, but I have always supported a freedom of information Act. The new Government promised one before they were elected, but have been remarkably silent since coming to power.

Mr. Maxton: It will be implemented.

Mr. Davies: I fear that it may not be the last promise made by the Labour Government that is likely to be buried. I leave that party political point aside. If we had a freedom of information Act, it would be possible for citizens to demand to see information where there was no explicit judicial or national security reason for withholding it.

The onus in the successful freedom of information Act in the United States is on the Administration to justify withholding information. They have to produce specific justifications in each case. That is not the case in Britain, but it should be. Even if the Labour party will not fulfil its electoral commitment to introduce such an Act—

Mr. Maxton *rose—*

Mr. Davies: I am about to finish. I hope and trust that, even in that event, it will be possible at least to publish

[Mr. Davies]

the Guinness report after what has been too long a delay. I hope that, in future, it will be a matter of good practice that any reports that form the basis of decisions that interfere in the markets and the freedom of individuals to conduct their business in the way that they choose should be made publicly and freely available.

10.39 am

Mr. Richard Page (South–West Hertfordshire): Occasionally, debates in the House lift the various motions above the mundane. We are grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) for launching such a one today and livening up our Wednesday morning activities. I am glad that he started by putting some distance between what he had to say and some leadership contest that I understand is currently taking place in the Conservative party. My hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) broadened the debate into the United States dimension. For a moment, I thought that we were about to be diverted into the advantages or disadvantages of self-regulation in the City. I am glad that he resisted the inducements of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) to take us down that path. Nevertheless, he corroborated part of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle and gave some substance to what he had to say.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle lifted a corner of the veil over certain Department of Trade and Industry inquiries. For me, it was a journey down memory lane. All of us who were Members of Parliament when the events to which he referred took place remember being deluged by highly expensive, glossy publications in which claim and counterclaim were made by Messrs Rowland and Al Fayed when they were having their lovers' tiff. Since then, they have kissed and made up and are once more good friends—or so they say. I kept and filed away all those publications. They will undoubtedly have some historic interest. For me, they are a marvellous example of the vanity and perhaps ruthlessness of wealthy men who are frustrated when what they want to achieve is no longer put in their hands. There is a great similarity with the behaviour of a child of four or five who has a toy taken away and drums his heels into the ground in frustration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle made a number of points and focused on the Guinness and House of Fraser affairs. I do not intend to comment on those cases. Once or twice, he extrapolated a point or two, but that was up to him. It is his debate. The question for me is the worries that he expressed about the guidelines for DTI inquiries and the inquisitorial style that has been used by the inspectors. My hon. Friend gave examples to buttress his concerns about the impact on the individuals who have been touched in these affairs, so it is right that I should ask the Minister to examine the guidelines and the methods of investigation. The investigators have not always covered themselves in glory, not only in the affairs that have been mentioned, but in others. A fresh look would not go amiss.

10.42 am

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Nigel Griffiths): May I add my congratulations to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your elevation to office. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) on securing the debate. I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), whom the House acknowledges to be a gentleman, and I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House who have been so helpful and supportive to me in my first weeks in office.

The debate is a serious one. I wish to cover as closely as possible the points that have been raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) and various other hon. Members, but it is important in the short time available to me to give my first impressions as a Minister of dealing with the Department of Trade and Industry investigations and enforcement directorate. I have taken the opportunity to meet as many of the staff as possible, and I am impressed by the commitment that they have shown and the depth into which they go into matters. Some of the remarks that were made earlier should not be allowed to detract from the tremendous work which all hon. Members believe the directorate does. The staff of the directorate are charged with investigating allegations of wrongdoing in companies, and we all agree that they have a difficult job.

The subject of today's debate is the inspectors' inquiries, which are more narrowly focused than the work of the investigations and enforcement directorate using its powers under section 447 of the Companies Act 1985.

The DTI has appointed 20 sets of inspectors under the Financial Services Act 1986 to investigate suspected contraventions of insider dealing law. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle concentrated his attention on the Companies Acts powers today. The powers are wider than those granted to section 447 investigators. Inquiries are usually announced and there is an expectation that in most cases there will be a published report. It is inevitable that the wider inquiries take longer to complete and are much more expensive, as they rely mainly on the appointment of external inspectors.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle expressed a valid fear that the examination of witnesses under our system was unfair and oppressive. He quoted Lord Justice Sachs, and I should like to quote him back to the hon. Gentleman. He said:

> "In the application of the concept of fair play, there must be real flexibility, so that very different situations may be met without producing procedures unsuitable to the object in hand . . . So many are the permutations and combinations that may arise in an investigation that it seems to me quite plain that it is impracticable and indeed ill-advised to attempt to lay down a set of rules applicable to all witnesses at all times."

There can be little doubt among hon. Members that, without flexibility—although there must be proper safeguards, and I believe that there are—and the considerable powers that are available, it would be simply impossible to amass the evidence that is required to bring the perpetrators of some of the complex City frauds and insider dealing share transactions to justice.

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend raised a valuable point when he asked that the guidelines be examined. The Minister mentions bringing the perpetrators to justice, but the Department has not covered itself in glory in past years. I earnestly ask the Minister not merely to read his brief but to re-examine the guidelines to see whether they are as effective and correct as they could be.

Mr. Griffiths: I am trying to keep party politics out of this. What we have really had is an assertion that, for

18 years, there has been some form of corruption at the heart of government in the investigations. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle shakes his head, but he used words which he may regret. He said that DTI inspectors led Ministers by the nose and he made more serious allegations. He referred to sinister motives and suggested that the Department was flawed and corrupted. He said that civil servants had taken sadly flawed judgments.

Mr. Page: No.

Mr. Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman implied that. Let us be frank with each other. Those are the serious allegations on which I as a Minister now have to satisfy myself and answer.

I have looked into the matter in some detail. I know that the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle has been in discussions with my office and I am grateful for the information that he gave us. As for sinister motives, let us consider what the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards said when he published part of the fourth report in March this year:

"From my examination of the DTI papers, I think it likely that the Lonrho campaign was, indeed, one of the factors affecting the advice given to Ministers . . . It was not, however, the only consideration and, in the end, probably not the main one."

Hon. Members have asked whether the inspectors' reports were unfair. I do not see any evidence of that. For instance, Lord Denning concluded:

"Inspectors should be masters of their own procedure. They should be subject to no rules except this: they must be fair. This being done, they should make their report with courage and frankness, keeping nothing back. Public interest demands it."

I believe that the inspectors have met that obligation. As the European Court said of the Al Fayed case:

"Whilst inspectors are accorded broad freedom in reporting on the affairs of public companies, the performance of their investigation function is attended by not inconsiderable safeguards intended to ensure a fair procedure and the reliability of findings of fact."

At the heart of the debate is the question whether the DTI will review the House of Fraser report. I must tell the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle that the answer is no. The European Court of Human Rights was extremely complimentary about the procedures followed by the inspectors when it gave judgment on the Al Fayeds' claim that the publication of the report was damaging to their right to a fair hearing. The court stated:

"Considerations of public interest dictate both the appointment of Inspectors and the publication or not"—

I stress the word "not"—

"of their report."

The court also quoted from an earlier European Commission of Human Rights hearing:

"It is necessary in a democratic society that governments exercise statutory controls over large commercial activities in order to ensure good management practice and the transparency of honest dealings."

Mr. Quentin Davies: No one would disagree with that quotation, but as for publication, does the Minister appreciate that at the moment and for the foreseeable future he will bear the responsibility if the Guinness report is not published? He cannot lay that responsibility on to anyone else. After such a long delay, will he or will he not now publish the DTI inspectors' report into the Guinness bid for Distillers?

Mr. Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman has repeated a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cathcart, which I was about to answer.

The inspectors have not yet completed the Guinness report, but it is expected shortly. That is not my fault. It should be noted that the inspectors have been constrained—I will not use the word hampered—by the judicial procedures. They were guided by the need to ensure that while court proceedings were in train they were not open to accusations of harassing witnesses and pursuing matters that were before the court. I am sure that that is a cause of frustration to DTI inspectors and former Ministers, as well as to me and my hon. Friend the Member for Cathcart, who has taken such a direct interest in the case for so many years. Everyone in Scotland and elsewhere who has taken an interest in the Guinness affair wants to see that report concluded as soon as possible. I am advised that it is expected shortly.

When the report is received, it will be given due consideration. It is the usual practice to publish reports into public companies, but a decision on whether to publish this one or any other such inspection can be made only after careful scrutiny of the signed report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cathcart rightly asked why the Guinness inspection has taken so long. I gave him one reason. I am sure that he knows more about the chronology of events than most, but I shall go through them for the benefit of the House.

I attach great importance to inspections being conducted as quickly as possible. As for the Guinness inspection, inspectors were appointed in November 1986. They submitted their interim report in November 1988. By that time, Ernest Saunders had been arrested. The first Guinness trial started in January 1990 and convictions were obtained in August 1990. In March 1991, the inspectors were directed to limit their work while the criminal proceedings against other defendants were in train. They resumed their work in March 1993. In March 1994, the inspectors went to court to certify Thomas Ward's failure to attend for interview. Ward was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for contempt. He is currently in the United States and contempt is not an extraditable offence.

Following the evidence gathering part of the inspection, the inspectors have spent most of the remaining time writing their report and, significantly, applying the fairness procedures. That process is commonly referred to as Maxwellisation and involves inspectors' putting the substance of their criticisms to those whom they are minded to criticise in their final report. That important procedure was highlighted by the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle.

The process takes time and it is sometimes open to abuse. It involves trying to balance the need to produce a quick report as efficiently as possible against the need to apply fairness by offering those likely to be criticised an opportunity to seek to dissuade the inspectors from their critical opinions.

I do not believe that any of the parties in the relevant cases have been denied that fairness. The delays in the publication of the report are, however, one reason why we want such powers to be used sparingly in the future.

[Mr. Griffiths]

Hon. Members have expressed their concerns this morning. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle for being honest enough to admit that he has suffered a change of mind. In March 1990 he criticised the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, Nicholas Ridley. He spoke of hon. Members' frustration

"that what the DTI inspectors described as the Fayeds' deceit and lies has not been met with their immediate disqualification as directors or, at the very least, with a bar from directorships of other United Kingdom companies".—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1990; Vol. 170, c. 250.]

In common with other hon. Members, I have looked at the evidence. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that I do not believe that there was any conspiracy or any incompetence on the part of DTI inspectors. It is a problem for all of us to ensure that public servants act in the best interests of the public. We in the House must safeguard that. I will of course consider any of the points raised that I have not so far answered and which the hon. Gentleman considers require further explanation.

It is vital that the Companies Acts are operated effectively. None of us takes any satisfaction from the lengthy delays in the Guinness trial or the rather unsavoury activities of Al Fayed and Lonrho. As a young, new Member, I, too, was subjected to their glossy publications. I learnt to use the circular filing cabinet and I put "From Hero to Zero" in the bin. I gather that they are not collectors items.

We cannot base what we do in government solely on the authority of investigative journalism. Any allegations must be considered. I assure hon. Members that officials at the DTI have given the case the closest consideration. That has been done not merely by one or two officials, but by a number who have cross-checked each other's work. They have advised Ministers accordingly.

We want the Guinness report to be concluded quickly. I have given an undertaking to the House that I want that done. We are also a Labour Government who want a flourishing corporate sector. We want it to deal honestly and fairly with its customers, suppliers, shareholders and, most important, employees. Those objectives go hand in hand and we cannot have one without the other. The Government will use all the powers at their disposal to deter, detect and punish wrongdoing.

Cyprus

10.59 am

Mr. Andy Love (Edmonton): I should like to add my congratulations to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your appointment and welcome you to your new position. I also offer belated congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), both on his appointment as Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and on the prominent part that he has played in forging a new relationship with our neighbours in the European Union.

I hope that hon. Members will bear with me as I make my traditional introductory remarks. It is a great honour to represent the people of Edmonton and I thank them for electing me as their Member of Parliament. I should also like to thank all those across London, both hon. Members and supporters, who worked so hard to achieve victory. For the first time, I am joined in the House by two other new Labour Members for the London borough of Enfield: my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan) and for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg). Not only is the borough now represented by three Labour Members of Parliament, but it has a Labour council which was newly elected in 1994 after 26 years of Tory rule.

This phenomenal run of electoral success began with the election of the first Labour Member of the European Parliament, Pauline Green, who was elected eight years ago. Like Pauline, I stood for election as a Labour and Co-operative candidate and now have the privilege of representing the Co-operative movement in the House. With my colleagues, I hope to bring its principles, values and experience to bear on hon. Members' deliberations.

Prior to the coming of the railways and the rapid expansion of London, Edmonton, like the surrounding villages of Enfield, Friern Barnet and Potters Bar, was represented in Parliament by a Middlesex county Member. Under the Reform Act of 1885 Edmonton became part of the Enfield parliamentary division. Local electors had to wait for the subsequent reform Act of 1918, which introduced the major innovation of a limited franchise for women, for the formation of the Edmonton constituency.

My immediate predecessor, Dr. Ian Twinn, was the seventh Member of Parliament for the constituency. Although, since its formation, there have been four Labour and three Conservative Members of Parliament, more than 50 years separate Dr. Twinn's election from that of the previous Tory Member. It is a measure of the regard in which he was held that Dr. Twinn served for 14 years in the House. I pay tribute to the tenacity with which he held the seat during that time. Indeed, I learnt that to my cost at the general election in 1992. The House will not be surprised to hear that we disagreed on many things, but he was, by unanimous consent, a tireless representative of local people and local causes. He will be particularly remembered in the House for his advocacy on behalf of Cyprus—a cause about which I know he feels passionately and to which I shall return later.

Among the distinguished list of my Labour predecessors, I wish to pay tribute to Ted Graham, now Lord Graham of Edmonton. Like me, he is not a native of Edmonton—he originally came from Tyneside. He came to work locally, stayed and formed a strong attachment to Edmonton and its people. In the nine years

that he served in the House, he built up an unrivalled reputation as a campaigner on issues affecting the constituency. He was, and to some extent still is, known as the voice of Edmonton. I wish him well, in the knowledge that he will be playing an active part in this Parliament in another place.

I have it on good authority from the Fees Office that Edmonton lies nine miles north of the House—*[Interruption.]* That struck a chord. Since local government reorganisation in the early 1960s, it has formed part of the London borough of Enfield, but it still maintains a distinct identity and character, of which its citizens are very proud. Depending on one's view, it is either blessed or cursed by being dissected by two of the busiest routes into and around the capital: the great Cambridge road and the north circular road, which are both currently being extended or strengthened.

The work is causing significant disruption, noise and pollution. Business is being badly affected, as are local shopping patterns. Local people wonder whether the disruption will ever end. But when the work is complete, the improved road network should hold out hope of much-needed investment in that part of north London—to some extent, that hope will be fulfilled. However, little thought has been given to the overall impact of the road developments on either the wider transport infrastructure or on public and private investment patterns locally. That is because decisions are fragmented and taken by unelected and unaccountable bodies. London needs a directly elected strategic authority to provide an independent voice and to act as a powerful champion for promoting economic, transport and planning strategies to boost prosperity and job growth.

I can also confirm that the local economy is in much need of a boost; it was undermined in the 1980s by two of the deepest recessions since the war and has not fully recovered. Much of the industry for which Edmonton was famous—furniture, electrical goods and electronics—has disappeared or moved to green-field sites. The replacement jobs have often been low skilled with low wages. Many people are insecure and it is not hard to find locals, particularly young people, who have been forced to change jobs two or three times in as many years. One in four of all our under-25s in Edmonton are unemployed. With few or no skills or qualifications, many of them have little prospect of gaining employment. For that reason, the people of Edmonton welcome the Chancellor's welfare-to-work initiative and the Government's commitment to provide meaningful employment and training that will lead to a qualification. For many people, the scheme will for the first time provide both the independence and self-respect that come with earning a wage.

Edmonton is a community of many contrasts. Alongside increasing prosperity, many people suffer considerable hardship and deprivation. One way in which those problems are being challenged is through the Edmonton partnership initiative, an innovative scheme to regenerate the local town centre. It is an attempt to reverse the long-term decline of the shopping centre while, at the same time, radically improving local housing conditions and providing community facilities and much-needed jobs and training for local people. Based on a public-private consortium, the initiative will attract more than £100 million of investment into the constituency, with more than £80 million of that coming from the private sector. Over the next seven years that exciting partnership project will transform the centre of Edmonton, delivering tangible benefits and increasing prosperity to one of the most deprived parts of the constituency.

Edmonton is also a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community. At the latest count, 65 languages were spoken in local schools. In the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, it will be a great privilege and pleasure to

"represent all of the people"

in my constituency. By far the largest local ethnic minority is the Cypriot community—Greek and Turkish—many of whom have come here since the invasion and division of the island in 1974. The future of Cyprus is of more than academic interest to all of them. It is with that in mind that I have sought to initiate this first debate on Cyprus in the new Parliament.

First, I offer the apologies of my hon. Friends the Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), who are great friends of Cyprus and regularly contribute to debates on this subject. Unfortunately, they are away on urgent business of the House and are unable to be with us today.

I congratulate Her Majesty's Government on their commitment, stated in the Queen's Speech, to seek a settlement in Cyprus. I warmly welcome the mission statement by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I am particularly pleased to see that, among its objectives, he includes:

"to work through international forums and bilateral relationships to spread the values of human rights, civil liberties and democracy which we demand for ourselves."

We must also demand them for Cyprus and the Cypriot people. It is appropriate that this debate is taking place today, because I understand that the Cypriot Foreign Minister, Mr. Cassoulides, is at this very moment flying into Britain for talks with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I am sure that the House will join me in wishing them well.

This year has been dubbed the year of the "big push" in Cyprus. There has certainly been a flurry of diplomatic activity in recent months, which is not surprising, given the number of international representatives who are currently on the island. Apart from the ubiquitous United Nations representative, who has recently been sponsoring proximity talks between the two communities, there are also representatives from the United States and from the European Union and, of course, Britain's own representative, the recently reappointed former ambassador to the UN, Sir David Hannay. This has occasioned the President of Cyprus to comment that there are "too many cooks", and one can see his point.

The critical issue facing the Government is to evaluate what role Britain can play in finding a just and lasting settlement for Cyprus. Before looking at that, I want to give a word of caution. Nearly 23 years have elapsed since the military invasion that divided the island and hopes of a settlement have risen in the past, only to be dashed. A flurry of diplomatic activity is no substitute for confidence-building measures and meaningful negotiations. The high-level agreements that form the starting point for direct negotiations and that set out the framework for a settlement were drawn up 18 years ago and it has to be admitted that there has been little real progress since.

[Mr. Andy Love]

It is widely recognised that there is a great deal of work to be done before there is a realistic prospect of reaching an agreement, but a consensus is emerging that that work must be undertaken urgently and that the measures necessary for the effective promotion of a settlement must be put in place. Britain is uniquely placed to facilitate that process, because of its historic role on the island; because it is a guarantor power of the security of Cyprus; and because it is a member of both the UN Security Council and the EU. Most important, Britain can help to ensure that any final agreement is based on international law, UN resolutions and the objectives of the Government's own mission statement.

Britain must make it clear that the continued division of Cyprus is unacceptable and can never form the basis of a settlement. Any solution must be based on the unity and integrity of the island. That is already set out in the high-level agreements and in the Gali set of ideas to create a bizonal, bicommunal federation comprising two politically equal communities. Over the years, many on both sides have cast doubt on that formulation, yet it describes the only framework that can provide both the unity and equality that are critical to a settlement.

Division on the island creates instability, as the furore over the now delayed purchase of Russian S300 missiles shows. A shift in the balance on one side leads to a response from the other and the result is military build-up. It is little wonder that, over the past 23 years, Cyprus has become one of the most over-militarised areas of the world and consequently a potential flash point. Any solution must be based on the demilitarisation of the island and in that respect the House should welcome the statement by Mr. Clerides, proposing to demilitarise the whole island and reallocate spending to the economic development of a reunited Cyprus.

It is, of course, security—or the lack of it—that has bedevilled all attempts to find a lasting solution. Both communities well remember the failures of the past—in 1963 and 1967—and the tragic events of 1974. No one underestimates the difficulty in achieving firm security guarantees. The people of Cyprus must have confidence that there will be no return to the communal violence or military interventions of the past.

Working next door to my constituency offices is a Cypriot shopkeeper, who has not seen his parents for 25 years. They are elderly and he despairs that he will never see them again. They are Greek Cypriots, but live in the Karpas peninsula in the north of the island. They should be able to travel, but cannot leave as they would find it impossible to return. Their relatives cannot visit. Ending their isolation must be the first step in building confidence and moving towards a settlement.

Both communities have suffered many grave injustices. If they are to be reconciled, each community is entitled to know what has happened to the loved ones who disappeared during the violence of the past. Like the truth commission in South Africa, justice demands that the terrible events of the past should be made public, so that the fate of the innocent victims can be known. In addition, the events of 1974 made hundreds of thousands of Cypriots on both sides refugees on their own island. Many would like to visit their villages, return to their homes and travel freely to other parts of the island, but they cannot do so. Any meaningful settlement must underpin the human rights of all Cypriots.

Cyprus has had a relationship with the European Community since it first signed an association agreement in 1972. A customs union in 1987 was rapidly followed by an application for membership of the EC in 1990. A favourable opinion from the Commission on Cyprus's eligibility in 1993 led to agreement at the Cannes summit two years ago that negotiations for accession should begin six months after the conclusion of the intergovernmental conference in Amsterdam. That will coincide with Britain's presidency of the EU and provide a unique opportunity for Britain to give a lead in supporting Cyprus's application.

Membership will benefit both communities. It will end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community and provide an impetus to the economy and a huge boost to living standards. The EU can help to guarantee the security of both communities. However, one question remains: will Cyprus be reunited, as we all hope, before those negotiations are completed? In November last year, the then Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, made it plain that it would be very difficult to admit a divided Cyprus to the EU. That view was subsequently echoed by the German Foreign Minister. The Government should continue to offer support to Cyprus's application for membership, on its merits and without conditions.

Much of the answer to the question of accession and of a general settlement lies, not in northern Cyprus, but in Turkey. Turkey's own application for membership has been described as "premature". It was told recently by the Christian Democrat group in the European Parliament that, as a non-Christian country, it was an unsuitable applicant for membership. I disagree fundamentally with that view.

However, there are continuing difficulties with the recently agreed customs union, and against that background it is unlikely that Turkey will be in a position in the near future to make a serious application for full membership. Many believe, as a result, that it is unlikely to encourage the Turkish Cypriot community to co-operate in the negotiations for Cyprus's entry to the EU. That would be regrettable, and I hope that the Government will make it clear that it can never be acceptable for a country that is not a member of the Community to exercise its veto on the application of another.

Relations between Greece and Turkey remain tense, and complicate the finding of a solution in Cyprus. Disputes about uninhabited islands, the military build-up in the region and friction regarding Cyprus continue to sour relations between the two nations—both, supposedly, NATO allies. As yet, diplomatic efforts to resolve the various disputes have met with very limited success. As both are guarantor powers, it is hard to see how any permanent settlement in Cyprus can be achieved without an overall resolution of the disputes in that part of the eastern Mediterranean.

The year 1997 will be crucial to Cyprus. The European Union and the United States appear to believe that there is a brief window of opportunity for a political settlement. Although proximity talks are not reported to have thrown up new initiatives or signs of greater flexibility, it is widely felt that, as Sir David Hannay was recently quoted as saying,

"the chances of getting a settlement are better than they have been for quite a long time".

In addition, with European Union accession negotiations, presidential elections in Cyprus and the distinct possibility of fresh elections in Turkey—all likely to happen in 1998—it is hard to avoid the conclusion that 1997 presents a better prospect than will exist for some time.

I was therefore very pleased to read recent press reports of the possibility of direct UN-sponsored talks between President Clerides and Mr. Denktash, expected to begin in early July. As part of that announcement, the UN emphasised the importance of the talks developing on a positive note. I believe that we would all agree. I also welcome the note of realism in that statement, saying that the first round

"may not yield any concrete results as such"

and that they will be followed by further talks later in the month. No one underestimates the task confronting the participants, but I am sure that the House will join me in wishing them every success in their endeavours.

However, Britain needs to do more. I hope that the debate will send a clear message that this House believes that the Government must do everything in their power to assist those negotiations, and that Ministers must use their influence with the international community to move the issue of Cyprus up the international agenda and to step up efforts to find a just and lasting settlement of the division of the island.

11.23 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your appointment to the Chair of the House, which I regard as a reflection of your long and very distinguished service in this place, and wish you success in your role.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on his maiden speech. I thank him for the pretty compliment that he paid his predecessor, Dr. Ian Twinn, who was a friend of many hon. Members on both sides of the House and a very good friend of the Parliamentary Friends of Cyprus. I am sure that it will be of considerable comfort to his constituents, and the wider Cypriot community in the United Kingdom, to know that the Edmonton tradition is being continued, and that the support for the movement behind the Parliamentary Friends of Cyprus and the Cypriot Brotherhood will continue to be represented by him in the House.

The hon. Member for Edmonton described the volatility of the constituency that he represents. However long or short his tenure of office in the House, I hope that he will enjoy it and that he will be successful in it. On this morning's showing, I am sure that he will be.

The hon. Gentleman neatly managed to weave that magic dance that all of us are required to weave the first time that we speak in the House, knitting together the virtues and joys of one's constituency, as the second garden of Eden, with the need to concentrate on the debate. I commend him on the manner in which he did so. I am sure that his constituents will be pleased to read his remarks in local newspapers and in *Hansard*.

I briefly turn to the subject of the debate—the future of the sadly divided island of Cyprus. Specifically, I shall mention the role that the Parliamentary Friends of Cyprus has played and will continue to play. I am sure that the hon. Member for Edmonton will quickly become a signed-up member of the organisation, and I hope that many of his new colleagues in the Government, and many of the colleagues who have joined us on the Opposition Benches, will take up that cause. I hope that they will understand that, as its title implies, the Parliamentary Friends of Cyprus means the friends of Cyprus and of all Cypriots worldwide, not—as, sadly, is sometimes said—merely the friends of Greek Cyprus.

Members of the Parliamentary Friends of Cyprus, on both sides of both Houses of Parliament, have worked for far too many years to secure a settlement of the division of the island of Cyprus that is in the interests of all those who have a legitimate right to live on, and move freely around, the island. No settlement will ever be possible of what has become known as the Cyprus problem that is not based on the three freedoms: freedom of movement, freedom of domicile and freedom of employment. Unless and until all international politicians involved in these debates understand that, there will never be a settlement.

However, I accept that the hon. Member for Edmonton is correct in believing that 1997, being the window of opportunity in the run-up to the Cypriot presidential elections and elections in Turkey, may offer an opportunity for a settlement that, if it is missed, may not come around again for some time. The year 1997 may be the year of Cyprus—the year of the "big push", as the hon. Gentleman described it—which some of us thought might have been 1996, 1995, 1994 or 1993. Such predictions have been made for far too long.

The hon. Gentleman illustrated his concern through the eyes of the neighbour to his office, a Cypriot whose parents live in a peninsula in the north of the island and who has been unable to visit his parents. That illustration encapsulates the problem that confronts many hon. Members. We have constituents who find themselves in a similar position.

I think of George Yerolemou, now an elderly man, who first came to me within days of my arrival in the House of Commons, 14 years ago, showing me a photograph of a simple dwelling in a village in the northern part of the island, which is his home. He has not seen that home now for well over 20 years. Sadly, his wife has died and will never see it again. For me, that is the Cyprus problem—the fact that there are people living in my constituency who are unable to go to their homeland, to move around it, to visit their Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot friends and drink coffee with them and to visit their family's graves. They can do none of those normal things.

The Berlin wall has come down; Germany has been reunited; we have watched the Soviet empire crumble. Wars and conflicts are being settled throughout the world. The Gulf war—a major middle east conflict—has been and gone. In this day and age, outrageously, an army of occupation continues to sit with virtual impunity in half of a territory, where it has sat since an invasion in 1974, while the entire might of the western world stands by, arguing the toss in the United Nations and passing resolution after resolution, and the Council of Europe and the European Union discuss the issue, and nothing happens. It cannot be right that the situation is allowed to continue.

It is time that the world community took the Cyprus issue as seriously as it has taken others. We must recognise that the instability of the Turkish economy and of some Turkish politicians makes it convenient to have a distraction just across the water, to focus Turkish

[Mr. Roger Gale]

attention on it and to distract the Turkish people from their problems at home. That may be convenient for Turkey, the power that works the strings of the regime in northern Cyprus, but it is no longer acceptable.

I hope that the present Administration will take the same determined attitude in the House as have previous Administrations since the invasion. They must send a clear message that the illegal regime in the northern part of Cyprus will never be recognised; that we, with our European partners, will press for the admission of Cyprus as swiftly as possible to the European Union; and that we hope, believe and expect that the international community will bring its best endeavours to bear to ensure that, before the year is out, the island will be united and our constituents, be they Turkish Cypriots or Greek Cypriots, will be able to move freely around their homeland.

11.30 am

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), first, on being canny enough to secure the debate. He is a new Member, but he has already managed to find his way around the House of Commons. I have been trying for some time to get one of these Wednesday morning debates, but I have not yet succeeded.

Secondly, my hon. Friend is to be congratulated on having the courage to open a debate in his maiden speech. His performance this morning bodes well for the future. That is no surprise to me, as I have known my hon. Friend for many years. He was a councillor in Haringey and the chair of the housing committee when I was a councillor. We spent many years discussing issues, especially matters relating to Cyprus.

My hon. Friend mentioned the ethnic diversity in his constituency, Edmonton, and said that Cypriots were the largest ethnic group. The reason for that is the fact that they left my constituency, Tottenham, and moved to Edmonton and further afield as they became more prosperous, having come mainly to Haringey in 1974 after the invasion of Cyprus. Cypriots, both Greek and Turkish, have made a great contribution to the economy of Haringey and of Tottenham in particular, and I believe that they will continue to play an important role in the local economy.

I was fortunate enough to be invited by the executive members of one of the Cypriot organisations in London, DEKO—the Democratic Party of the Workers of Cyprus—to visit Cyprus in April this year. It was my third visit to Cyprus. I have been to the green line, to demonstrations in Morphou and to conferences in Cyprus. It was my first opportunity to see in detail the way in which the Cyprus problem has affected the lives of people there.

At the Ledra Palace on the green line I met a woman who was there with her daughter. She was looking across at the Turkish side. She pointed out her house to me and said, "It is 100 metres from where I stand, yet I cannot go there." She told me that she had been coming there every day since 1974.

There were huge pictures on display, showing the violence that occurred in Cyprus in August last year, when three Greek Cypriot men were killed. One was an old man who was collecting snails in the mountains. He did not know where the green line was and happened to wander over to the Turkish side. He was beaten and shot dead. Another picture depicted a young man who had climbed a flagpole to remove the Turkish flag. He was shot down like a dog by the Turkish authorities. A third person was beaten and killed.

That brought home to me the grief of Cyprus and the problems that exist there. With my hon. Friends, I am determined to do something about the matter. One wonders how the previous British Government could sit in office for 18 years and do nothing to try to resolve the situation in Cyprus.

The United Nations should deal with the matter, but as a guarantor power and one of the old colonial powers in Cyprus Britain has a clear responsibility to do as much as it can to bring the other guarantor powers together. I hope that the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), will give us an assurance that, in addition to what the United Nations is doing, the Labour Government will do everything in their power to bring together the other guarantor powers, Greece and Turkey, and to get things moving.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton raised various points with which I agree. He spoke about the missing persons. There are about 1,500 missing persons on the Greek Cypriot side and hundreds on the Turkish Cypriot side. Any settlement must deal with their fate.

As a gesture of good will in the talks that are currently taking place, the rights of the people of the enclave, particularly in the north of Cyprus, must be taken into account. Those people are in serious difficulties and their rights must be guaranteed. I call on the Turkish Cypriot side in particular to ensure as a gesture of good will that the rights of the people of the enclave are respected.

I am particularly concerned about the demilitarisation of Cyprus. As my hon. Friend stated, the Turkish soldiers in the northern part of Cyprus have been bolstered by Turkish settlers from Anatolia. When demilitarisation takes place and the soldiers leave, the majority of the settlers, if not all of them, should leave as well.

The agreement must ensure that Cyprus becomes a bizonal and bicommunal community. That was the original agreement made between Mr. Denktash and Archbishop Makarios, and it must be honoured if there is to be a way forward.

In relation to the European Union I believe, like my hon. Friend, that Cyprus should be admitted, regardless of the state of the country—whether it is divided or not. The Government of Cyprus, who are the legitimate Government recognised by the United Nations and by all countries except Turkey, have applied for membership of the European Union. I believe that Cyprus is entitled to become a member, and that that should happen as soon as possible. I hope that when Britain has the presidency of the European Union next year, we will ensure that Cyprus's membership application goes through.

Meanwhile, I oppose Turkish membership of the EU for a number of reasons. First, its relationship with Cyprus rules it out; secondly, and more importantly, human rights in Turkey are a thorough disgrace. There must be no question of Turkey becoming a member so long as it continues to treat Kurdish people in the way it does—

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): My hon. Friend has mentioned the abuse of human rights in Turkey

and Turkey's continued illegal occupation of the north of Cyprus. Does he agree not just that it would be wholly wrong for Turkey to be considered for membership of the EU in those circumstances, but that it is wholly wrong that western nations should continue to supply economic aid and military weapons to Turkey while the illegal occupation continues?

Mr. Grant: I thank my hon. Friend. The difficulty is that Turkey is a member of NATO, and certain treaties need to be upheld. Britain, however, could adopt the stance that my hon. Friend has mentioned; I shall support him if he wants to push the matter further by means of a motion or some other procedural device.

I want to mention Mr. Asil Nadir before I close—that infamous person who jumped bail, absconded and was allowed to stay in northern Cyprus. He has now gone to Turkey, where he is flaunting his presence and trying to do deals with the British Government. I am pleased that our Government have refused to do deals with Mr. Nadir. I hope that Turkey will come to its senses and return him to Britain so that he can face justice here.

When reaching any solution for Cyprus, we must take into account the deserts of both sides. The Turkish Cypriot side has had little championing in this House. Mr. Andrew Faulds, a former Member, was one of the few in this House who spoke up for the Turkish Cypriots. I believe that they have every right to have their safety guaranteed. The events of the early 1970s—Eoka and the coup—mean that Turkish Cypriots have good reason to believe that they would be under severe threat in a reunited Cyprus. It is therefore incumbent on all who are concerned about Cyprus and its reunification to ensure that the Turkish Cypriots are given absolute guarantees of their safety and their ability to purchase and maintain properties in Cyprus. They must be given a fair deal as an integral part of any united Cyprus.

I look forward to further debates on Cyprus. I was extremely pleased that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister mentioned the country in the Queen's Speech, as he did in the Labour party manifesto. I look forward to the Labour Government working to ensure a free, democratic, demilitarised and united Cyprus.

11.43 am

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), who was a sturdy fighter for Cyprus even before he entered the House. I know that the Cypriot community in Britain was overjoyed to hear of his election to this place. I commiserate, too, with his predecessor, Dr. Ian Twinn, who was also a magnificent fighter for Cyprus. I am sure that he will continue the fight outside this place.

I hope that the new Government will take the Cyprus issue more seriously than the previous one did. We have some responsibilities toward Cyprus, and in the past I believe that we have let the people of Cyprus down. The people of Cyprus are our allies. On the first day of the second world war, 40,000 out of an available 52,000 Cypriots volunteered for active service to fight fascism in Europe. During that conflict and in subsequent conflicts they have always been on our side, but unfortunately there have been times when they needed our help and we did not reciprocate.

Cyprus has been a good member of the Commonwealth and has participated fully in it. Britain is a guarantor power, yet British Governments do not have a good record in the matter: 23 years after the illegal invasion and occupation we have yet to reach an agreement to sort the problem out. One reason for that is the fact that what is at stake is not the foreign policy of Cyprus but rather the foreign policy of the United States of America. Recently the President of the United States visited this country, and I know that our Prime Minister discussed Cyprus with him while he was here.

America's attitude has little to do with missiles based in Turkey, which used to point toward the east of Europe but which now point elsewhere. It has more to do with the fact that 73 per cent. of the world's oil and gas reserves are to be found in the region. That is what interests the Americans and guides their policy. However, it is about time we started looking at the interests of the people of Cyprus, more than 400,000 of whom have been dispatched to live elsewhere in the world because of the partition.

There is a window of opportunity at the moment. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton is sympathetic to the cause of finding a real solution to the Cyprus problem. Our presidency of the EU starts in January, and I know that the Foreign Secretary has put Cyprus's entry to the EU at the top of his agenda. That offers us and Cyprus a genuine opportunity. The EU would be foolhardy even to contemplate delaying Cyprus's entry to Europe. It is in Europe's interests that Cyprus should play a full part as a member country.

Cyprus has excellent trade links with eastern European countries—better than those of any country in the EU. It also has good trading links with the middle east—better than ours. As an economist, I know that the western world's economy has been in recession—a point that the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) used to make when he was a Minister—and that the only way out is to trade our way out of that recession with the third world. All the African countries have sound trading relations with Cyprus, for instance.

As for defence, we have two strategic bases in Cyprus which will continue to be important to the defence of Europe once Cyprus joins the EU.

There is an ever increasing need in world trade for shipping, and the fleets of Cyprus and Greece combined would give the EU the second largest fleet in the world. So Cyprus's accession would boost the EU's trading possibilities.

Cyprus is also very active in banking and has its own banking system. More than 1,800 offshore companies are registered there and over the past few years it has developed its own stock exchange. It could perhaps give Europe an opportunity for offshore banking that is not afforded to it at the present time.

Geographically, Cyprus is important for telecommunications and Britain recognises this. Everybody knows that telecommunications will play a large part in the future of the world. As an offshore telecommunications bank, Cyprus is ideally situated, and Europe could benefit greatly from that.

Last but not least, there is a programme, a structure, an agreement, for oil and gas pipelines to come down from eastern Europe, which will service most countries of the European Union, and also to have an oil and gas pipeline

[Mr. Alan Meale]

into Cyprus. That will make Cyprus—particularly with the shipping that it has in conjunction with Greece—the gas station of Europe. It would be foolhardy for Britain and Europe not to allow Cyprus to play a full part in the European Union when that opportunity arises. I see no reason why Cyprus should not be a full member of the European Union.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary push for a speedy solution to get Cyprus in as a full member of the European Union, that will benefit Britain and Europe in the future.

11.50 am

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on his maiden speech. As a joint vice-chairman of the Parliamentary Friends of Cyprus, I am particularly pleased that he was generous enough to pay tribute to his predecessor, Dr. Ian Twinn, who worked with us on that committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) said that the needs and views of the Turkish Cypriot community have not been properly attended to. As the hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) said earlier, the Parliamentary Friends of Cyprus has tried since 1974 to be friends of both Cypriot communities and to work with those in both communities—on the island and in London—who were willing to work with us, not for us to tell them what a solution should look like, but to try to create a climate in which that solution becomes more possible.

There was an extremely significant development on the island while we were otherwise engaged in March this year. The all-Cyprus trade union forum, linking trade unions in both parts of the island, came together—something that it has not done for many years—to talk about the effects on the working people of Cyprus of the future accession of Cyprus to the European Union. There is no question but that the main beneficiaries of Cypriot membership of the European Union will be the members of the Turkish Cypriot community. That is indisputable.

Without going back over history—much of it painful—I believe that the people who have paid the highest price for the continued division of Cyprus have been the ordinary working people of the north of Cyprus, who have been starved of the partnerships that have been on offer for many years from the southern part of the island. There was a hope—a distinct possibility—that Varosha could be handed back, and as part of that arrangement there would be joint ventures involving business people from both Cypriot communities.

The all-Cyprus trade union forum met at the Ledra Palace hotel, which is a living example of the futility, the stupidity, the grief of disputes such as those which have torn Cyprus apart. I have nothing but praise for the painful efforts that the United Nations has made over the years, and for those who have made up the peacekeeping force on the island. For those of us with photographic memories of what that hotel was like before the cruel and barbarous invasion of the island in 1974, in many ways it is worse now than the Berlin wall ever was, because it is much nearer.

If one looks from old Nicosia across the no man's land into the occupied part of the island, one sees that it is absolutely untouched by human beings, save for the odd United Nations patrol. We are three years from the end of the millennium. Is this really the best that men and women can deliver in an island as small as Cyprus? It is crazy, because there has not been a shared willingness by the leaders of both Cypriot communities to reach a solution. That is what makes so important the move by the all-Cyprus trade union forum to bring together representatives of working people from both Cypriot communities to discuss and debate the benefits that would flow to them, their families and to the island as a whole from the admission of Cyprus to the European Union. There is no question but that that would be beneficial. As ever, of course, politicians will get in the way of that.

Over the years, many of us have valued our contact with Mr. Denktash as the representative of the other Cypriot community. He will understand, I am sure, when I say—perhaps he shares this feeling—that many of us have found the discussions in which we have engaged exceptionally frustrating. He may well have found the same with us. It must be understood—this was mentioned earlier—that the Turkish Cypriot community has an absolute right to have its security and human rights guaranteed. They are in no sense a second-class community on the island of Cyprus. They enjoy, and deserve to enjoy, equal political status. I am not interested in counting heads, as evidence from around the world, including parts of the United Kingdom, proves that counting heads and saying, "This is a majority community and that is a minority community," does not help to solve problems. It helps to make them worse and to keep them going.

That is why I say—I hope that Mr. Denktash will accept this, and that it may encourage him in the contacts that are about to resume—that in no sense does anybody regard the Turkish Cypriot community as second class. They have equal political status. They are entitled to a full say, not just in a settlement to the Cyprus question but in the negotiations concerning Cyprus's admission to the European Union. Seats have been reserved by the Government of Cyprus for representatives from the Turkish Cypriot communities to take part in the negotiations. Given political willingness, ways can be found—and are found, by the representative in Nicosia—to consult and to try to involve them informally in the lead-up to the detailed negotiations. There is no substitute for their taking their proper place.

I hope that Mr. Denktash will seize this new opportunity—heaven knows, as a number of hon. Members have been saying for long enough, it is a glorious opportunity, the best for years—for leaders of both communities to take part in the negotiations. They are getting on a bit, they have seen it all, they studied together and qualified in law in London, and no doubt sank a pint or two, donkey's years back. Now, as they look forward to their active careers in politics perhaps coming to an end, is it really beyond their wit, on behalf of the two Cypriot communities which they lead, to sit down, to put their differences on the table, but to come to the conclusion that they have more in common than not?

There are large issues to be settled. I have mentioned security. There is the question of freedom of movement on the island and the vexed question of the settlers brought in from Turkey. Those questions are not easy, but if there is a willingness to find a solution, a solution can be found.

As the hon. Member for North Thanet said earlier, despite all the stumbling blocks, potholes and other things that can go wrong, the opposing factions in South Africa and the middle east have found ways of sitting down, talking to each other and committing themselves to a process the end result of which is agreement. Both sides in those examples, and many others around the world, committed themselves to success.

We have a right now to say to Mr. Denktash and President Klerides that we expect them to seize the opportunity later this month of the renewed contacts and to accept their solemn responsibility and duty to bring peace, stability and security to both Cypriot communities. That is to the benefit of both and in the interests of the whole.

12.1 pm

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I require only a couple of minutes, so I have allowed as many hon. Members to speak as possible. The House has heard me speak on this subject at four or five-weekly intervals during the past three years and I have nothing new to add.

I compliment the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on his brave and excellent maiden speech. I add my thanks to a number of others for his compliments to his predecessor, Dr. Ian Twinn. He is a friend of mine of some 20 or 30 years, standing, so I am particularly grateful to him for that. Ian Twinn spent a great deal of time in what was my office and is now the Minister of State's office in the Foreign Office pursuing precisely this issue. The hon. Member for Edmonton has honourably maintained the tradition of adopting a high profile in representing his constituents on the issue. He took a balanced view, which was also reflected in the speech made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett).

The hon. Member for Edmonton said that he wants Britain to restore the unity of Cyprus. I think that there is agreement on that throughout the House. This is not a partisan matter. This has been a largely non-partisan debate, with the exception of some ill-informed comments from the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale). I have obeyed a strict self-denying ordinance on the subject for three years, trying not to score party political points about something that affects the lives and futures of so many people in Cyprus. I wish that he would do the same.

The hon. Member for Edmonton said that he wanted Cyprus to have a higher profile on the international agenda. The Conservative Government achieved just that. Malcolm Rifkind created a precedent by being the first Foreign Secretary to go there for some 30 years. We appointed our own special representative and fought hard in the EU and in the United Nations to have the issue resolved, often at some political cost. The Minister will find the same problems as he takes up the issue and I am sure that he, too, will find it hard. We are all committed to obtaining a peaceful and equitable solution to this tragic problem.

There were a number of other cogent and valuable contributions today, most notably from my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), but from others as well, with which I found much to agree.

This is my first opportunity to congratulate the Minister of State on his appointment. I look forward to his matching my grey hairs during the next few years, as a result of dealing with not just the Cyprus issue, but a number of others which will test him. I pledge all necessary personal support to the aim of obtaining a peaceful and equitable solution to this tragic problem in the next few years.

12.4 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): I begin by congratulating you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your appointment. By reputation, you are an affable man, but I know the other side of you. You are a stern and firm man when necessary. We look forward to that latter quality when the Government are in trouble, as no doubt we will be on some occasions in the next five years. However, I know that you will retain the impartiality in your current responsibility that you showed in your past responsibilities.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) on his foresight in making an early application for this debate which the past hour has shown to be of considerable interest to hon. Members. It is a great credit to him that he has chosen to make his maiden speech on this subject. He said that Lord Graham had been the voice of Edmonton. After my hon. Friend's excellent contribution, there will be a new voice of Edmonton, which the House will look forward to hearing on a number of occasions in the future. He was generous to his predecessors, eloquent, knowledgeable about his constituency and committed to the subjects on which he feels strongly. It is a credit to him that he was able to make such a speech today.

New hon. Members may not be aware that, for an Adjournment debate, this has been well attended. Again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on choosing a subject of such interest to so many hon. Members. There have been many good contributions.

I thank the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) for his kind remarks on my appointment and for his commitment that the Conservative party will do what it can to seek a settlement of the Cyprus issue. He referred to my pending grey hairs. One learns one or two secrets in opposition in that regard and I shall be happy to see him afterwards to give him some advice which he may wish to follow. I can assure him that being an Opposition spokesperson is a tiring business. There is a lot of campaigning to do which can result in more grey hairs than might be acquired even in government. *[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke) says, Falkirk supporters are even more afflicted by that trouble than others.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) asked whether the Government would have a determined attitude on Cyprus and I can assure him that they will. My hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant), with whom I have had a long association on foreign affairs and other matters, made a knowledgeable contribution. I was particularly impressed by his emphasis on the contributions of both the Greek and Turkish communities in his constituency and in neighbouring constituencies to the economic and social fabric of the communities in which they live. I can also give an assurance to my hon. Friend. He said that this Government, as the inheritors of a guaranor power, have a definite responsibility towards Cyprus. I assure him that that is certainly the case.

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) that, in looking forward to the British presidency, we have Cyprus very high up the list of our international obligations. We will consult widely on how best we can proceed to raise the issue and to persuade others to reach a settlement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) emphasised that a settlement in Cyprus and accession to the European Union would be of benefit to both communities, but that one community might benefit more than the other. That point was well made, and well taken at the Dispatch Box.

It is right that Cyprus should be among the first foreign affairs subjects to command the House's attention this Parliament. As hon. Members have made clear, the history of Cyprus is long and tragic. It has been recounted on many occasions in the House, and we have heard further contributions today recalling the suffering and loss that the Cypriot people have endured over many years. That strife has scarred the people of the island and has led to a culture of hostility and suspicion in both communities. That is intolerable for present and future generations of Cypriots, and unacceptable and intolerable for the international community.

There can be no doubt that successive failures to address those divisions has left Europe with a dangerously unstable region in the eastern Mediterranean. That is why emphasis was laid in the debate on the Loyal Address on the Government's commitment to work actively in support of the UN for a lasting settlement of the Cyprus conflict.

The question that citizens in this country and those in Cyprus will be asking is whether progress towards peace is realistic. I do not have to remind the House of the difficult start to 1997. Indeed, hon. Members who have contributed to the debate have already emphasised that point. The recent violence followed the violence that marked much of 1996. I hope that both sides of the House will agree on the need to work for a comprehensive, political settlement in Cyprus, establishing a bizonal, bicommunal federation comprising two politically equal communities.

Despite the setbacks, the United Nations, supported by the international community, has been working hard with both parties since March to prepare the way for face-to-face negotiations. The preparatory process has been taken as far as it can; real progress, as the House knows, can be made only through direct talks. We therefore support the UN's aim of convening face-to-face negotiations within a few weeks. It is important that the ground we have gained this year is not lost.

Of course, problems remain, but the prospects for getting both parties to talk to each other under UN mediation are now better than they have been for a long time. I therefore urge the leaders of both communities to respond positively to an invitation to negotiations from the UN Secretary-General. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will pursue that process in talks later today with the Foreign Minister of Cyprus.

There is a heavy burden of responsibility on the shoulders of the leaders of both communities to negotiate a settlement. I know that they are aware of the responsibility and I urge them to exercise it wisely. There is an equal burden of responsibility on each and every Cypriot to make any settlement work.

I noticed that many Cypriots across the divide were prepared to make the first, tentative steps—to gather at a bicommunal concert in Nicosia on 19 May. The success of that concert is encouraging and I hope that more Cypriots will take up future offers to attend similar bicommunal events. They are crucial in breaking that familiar stranglehold of suspicion which we all know exists.

Of course, there will be those do not wish to see a peace process through reconciliation. Some tried, but failed, to disrupt the concert I referred to. I congratulate the authorities on both sides on the firm stance they took with the protesters. Those wreckers see peace coming not through reconciliation but only through the dominance of one side over the other. They aim to inspire fear and to deter those who want to take part and genuinely want to extend the hand of friendship. They will fail, however, for negotiation and reconciliation are the only paths to a lasting peace in Cyprus.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton reminded us of the tragedy of family life on the island of Cyprus and my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham made the same point. Families on one side of the line have not been to visit their relatives for 20 years or more. When the wreckers consider their tactics, they should think of the plight of those families and others.

I have said that we hope that if face-to-face negotiations are convened, both leaders will work constructively with the UN Secretary-General's negotiator, Diego Cordovez, and his team. The parties must be ready to do business; there will be much to do and many issues need to be addressed, including security, territory, refugees, the provisions of a new constitution, the powers of the zones, the powers of the federation and voting mechanisms. Those are just some of the matters of important concern.

The issues may appear impossibly complex to many of us, although many of the hon. Members in the House today have been acquainted with those problems and complexities for many years. Fortunately, the parties do not have to start from scratch. The useful work left over from previous attempts to negotiate a settlement provides a good starting point. The "Set of Ideas", for example, is a useful quarry. The parties themselves also have a depth of experience and knowledge of much of the detail. We look to them to apply that knowledge with the political will, the determination and the vision to make possible the compromises that will be inevitable to ensure success. Nobody, including the UN, can impose a settlement. Ultimately, it is for the Cypriots themselves to decide their future and they now have an historic opportunity to do so.

Hon. Members and people in the country have asked about the role of the United Kingdom in the negotiations. We stand ready to help in any way. We recognise that we have a historical and moral duty to do so. As the House will know, we have reappointed Sir David Hannay as UK special representative for Cyprus. He will visit Cyprus, Greece and Turkey next week, and he will continue to help both sides with advice, encouragement and support.

I have no doubt that our help and that of the international community will be more than ever needed in the months ahead. We must, however, be guided on some matters by the UN mediator, Diego Cordovez, on how

best we and others can assist. I know from the contributions in the debate today that hon. Members on both sides will want us to do our utmost.

Mr. Grant: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his new position. Is it the Government's position that they should reconvene a meeting of the guarantor powers? My hon. Friend mentioned Sir David Hannay, who would go as an ambassador to the various guarantor powers. Has my hon. Friend considered the British Government themselves calling a meeting of the guarantor powers to discuss the matter?

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that point. I assure him that the British Government want to see the parties brought together. Our view is that it would be better for us to use our best endeavours to bring those parties together under the United Nations rather than to reconvene a meeting, as we believe that that would have more impact and would probably be easier to achieve.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I also congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his new position. I did not seek to intervene earlier because many hon. Members wished to contribute to the debate. I assure the hon. Gentleman that he will have the support of the whole House and certainly that of Liberal Democrat Members in pursuit of the policies he has outlined. If the British Government can play an active role in concert, of course, with the United Nations in seeking a lasting settlement in Cyprus, the Minister will certainly have the support of Liberal Democrat Members.

Mr. Henderson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that commitment and his reassurance. I can give him a reciprocal assurance that when new issues and initiatives arise, we shall endeavour to keep every group of interests well briefed on developments. That would include hon. Members—and, indeed, the parties that they represent—who have shown an interest in seeking a settlement in Cyprus.

We know that negotiation will not resolve itself quickly, as has been said. We are not talking about one make-or-break negotiating session. Indeed, we do not necessarily expect to find a solution this year. Hon. Members will recognise that the process will need to take account of the impending presidential elections in the Republic of Cyprus in February 1998. That is not however an excuse for standing still, and we hope that progress will be made on a number of key issues. The negotiating process needs a basis to ensure that progress continues in early 1998. We are ready to help the United Nations manage any break in the negotiating process.

As hon. Members know only too well, a settlement cannot be achieved easily, but the consequences of another failure would be grave. On the other hand, a settlement would mean an end to the tragedies that have been described in the debate, an end to the continuing spiral of arms purchases that has made Cyprus the tinder box it is today and an improvement in the climate of relations between Greece and Turkey.

I turn to the European Union dimension. The prospect of Cyprus's accession to the EU brings a new opportunity to make progress towards a settlement. Accession negotiations are due to open six months after the end of the intergovernmental conference under our EU presidency. We expect that that important initiative will begin on time.

We welcome the prospect of Cyprus's accession to the EU and hope that it will stimulate both sides to make progress towards a settlement through direct talks hosted by the UN. I should make it clear again that no third party can have any veto over that process. We believe that membership of the EU will benefit all Cypriots in terms of political and economic co-operation and the social benefits that EU citizens enjoy. As has been said, Cyprus itself can make a substantial contribution to EU activities.

Above all, a settlement of the Cyprus problem will mean that that troubled island will start the new millennium with confidence, vigour and hope. I am pleased that hon. Members have been so committed to helping to find a settlement that can allow that to happen. The Government make the same commitment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. We move to the next debate, on arrangements for Prime Minister's Question Time.

Prime Minister's Question Time

12.22 pm

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): I congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service on his appointment. I believe that it is some time since Liverpool has had a Minister in Her Majesty's Government. I am only sorry that he should have to answer and support a case of such weakness, but I have no doubt that he will plough through it.

Almost the first act of the new Government, which was announced by press release when the House had not fully convened, was to allow the Prime Minister to get away from having to answer to Parliament twice a week. That act, which was carried without consultation, is entirely contrary to the unanimous recommendation of the Procedure Committee. The recommendation was most carefully made, following the taking of much evidence—including, somewhat unusually, from three previous Prime Ministers.

The recommendation in paragraph 41 of the Procedure Committee's report reads:

"We are not persuaded that a change, under the existing format for Prime Minister's Questions, to one 30 minute session a week is desirable."

The report was unanimously agreed by the Committee, which included four Labour Members, one of whom is now a Minister. They were the hon. Members for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), for Burnley (Mr. Pike), for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), and for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who is now a Minister. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) also voted in favour. The view taken by the Procedure Committee was given definite and specific backing.

Such evidence may be enough—but, stop, is there something more? I remind the House that there is. On page 43 of the report, a letter reads:

"I can see a good case for a radical overhaul of Prime Minister's Questions to replace the existing pattern with a once weekly session of half an hour in which there is more of an opportunity to probe the Prime Minister in depth . . . I very much doubt that any Prime Minister or Leader of the Opposition has ever actually looked forward to 3.15 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. These sessions"—

mark the word "sessions"—

"are however a fundamental part of our parliamentary democracy, and a part that is now familiar to the public."

That evidence was given not by a Conservative Minister but by the Prime Minister when he was Leader of the Opposition. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister repeated the phrase "Trust me" many times, but it is proving a fairly hollow entreaty as the Blair Government set about riding roughshod over the rights and duties of Parliament to hold the Executive to account.

Let us consider the issue in a logical sequence and consider the arguments put by the Leader of the House, who I am sorry is not in her place to defend her action. I believe that the decision was forced on her and was not of her own choosing. The Prime Minister rejected absolutely the concept of the right of the Leader of the Opposition to have a go at the Prime Minister twice a week—which had been his right. He had made it nearly mandatory to ask three supplementary questions each session, totalling six questions a week—at least two being carefully prepared soundbites ensuring that some damaging comment was made about the Government.

The President of the Council said that it was necessary to implement the decision immediately or it would never be implemented. She must understand that that is nonsense, given that there is a motion on today's Order Paper to set up a Committee to look into the matter. One presumes that that Committee's recommendations will be carried. Why, therefore, was there a need to rush the matter through without proper consultation, which previous Governments and Lord Presidents of the Council had always allowed whenever alterations to procedure were considered?

The moment that he came to power, the Prime Minister ran away from the concept of having Prime Minister's questions twice a week. He claimed that Parliament was not served by them and that a session once a week would be more serious and would allow more questions to be asked. With the open-ended question still in operation, Prime Minister's questions will not become more constructive or more serious. Yes, we may get through one or two more questions in a single 30-minute session than with the Tuesday and Thursday routine, but why? Because the Prime Minister, when he was the Leader of the Opposition, used to take up between 25 per cent. to 40 per cent. of the 15-minute session with his questions and the answers to them. Anyone will realise that the major sufferer under the new regime will be the Leader of the Opposition. He will not be called six times by Madam Speaker in the 30-minute session. Of course we will get through one or two more Back-Bench questions, but at whose expense? It will be at the Leader of the Opposition's expense. I am certain that that will not displease the Prime Minister. He has now made six equal three. That is imaginative mathematics even for the new Labour Government.

Of real concern, as hon. Members who have been here for some time will know, is the topical aspect to Prime Minister's Question Time. Subjects for questions to the Prime Minister on Thursday afternoons often arose from the Cabinet meeting on Thursday mornings. Now, the chance to ask those questions will not arise for six days. The Sunday papers will often have already presented the Government's view and the topicality will have gone six days later.

A side issue is that the most popular time for the public to request orders for the Gallery was for the twice-weekly sessions of Prime Minister's Question Time. The orders for those sessions were like gold dust, but the public will now have only half the opportunities to see the Prime Minister at work. The public outside will see the Prime Minister under fire only once a week on television. The twice-weekly sessions used to be very popular.

We will make Prime Minister's Question Time more constructive only when we limit the open-ended question, as I have said. That was resisted by Labour Members in opposition because, they argued, Prime Minister's questions would lose their topicality. That argument becomes even stronger if what is topical on Wednesday evening or Thursday cannot be dealt with until six days later. The change will reduce the chance of removing the limitation of the open-ended questions, which is the one way in which the Procedure Committee argued we could make Prime Minister's Question Time more serious and more constructive.

The move by the Prime Minister amounts to limits on the Opposition that he absolutely refused to accept when he was in opposition. Nobody can tell me differently,

because I argued personally with the Prime Minister's staff in his office on that point. When in opposition, he wanted no alteration to the existing pattern.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I participated in the Procedure Committee's inquiry into the subject. Does he acknowledge that it would have been much better to have the debate as soon as possible after publication of the Procedure Committee's report? The debate could have been accommodated within the business of the House by the previous Government, but they never gave us the opportunity to debate it. We could have heard the arguments, including those from the then Leader of the Opposition, before the general election. We could have had a good debate using that experience and the report before us, instead of leaving the report hanging in the air without any conclusion, as unfortunately happened under the previous Government.

Sir Peter Emery: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the previous Leader of the House, Mr. Tony Newton, proceeded with procedural changes only if there was general agreement between the usual channels. It was the specific refusal of the Opposition to agree to the Government's proposal to provide Government time that meant that the debate did not take place. I should know, because I negotiated with the Leader of the House to try to arrange the debate. It was specifically because the then Leader of the Opposition did not wish to change the existing practice—he did not want to incorporate the suggestions that we were making—that the report was not considered by the House.

Proper parliamentary reform must always be conducted with the mutual agreement of the majority of hon. Members. When reform has been thrust through by one party, it has usually failed. I know that better than most, having been the Chairman of the Procedure Committee for 14 years.

The Prime Minister is refusing to allow himself to be questioned as every Prime Minister has been questioned for the past 35 years. Why? It must either be because he is willing to treat the House of Commons with disdain, or because he is afraid of being cross-questioned by his peers twice a week. He admitted in his letter to the Procedure Committee that he does not look forward to that.

Mr. Mike Hall (Weaver Vale): The right hon. Gentleman says that the Prime Minister is frightened to answer questions. If so, why has my right hon. Friend introduced changes that will lead to more questions, not fewer?

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening to me. What the Prime Minister has done is to turn six into three.

Mr. Hall *indicated dissent.*

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Member should not shake his head. When the Prime Minister was Leader of the Opposition, he asked six questions in the two sessions. If the Leader of the Opposition has the chance to ask only three questions once a week, Back Benchers will obviously have more time for questions.

As I was saying, either the Prime Minister is afraid of being cross-questioned by his peers or he wishes to limit the House's ability to hold the Executive to account. Whichever is true, it is ignoble and it shows an arrogance and disdain for Parliament. It shows a contempt more normally associated with some of the so-called democratic leaders of banana republics.

What have we seen in the Session so far? No statement was made to the House on the alteration of the role of the Bank of England; no statement was made to the House on the defence review; and no statement was made to the House about the changes that will protect the Prime Minister from having to come to the House twice a week. The phrase "Trust me" has a hollow ring indeed, when it comes to protecting the rights of Parliament.

12.37 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) for allowing me a moment or two—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Does the hon. Gentleman have the permission of the Minister to speak? In Adjournment debates such as this, it is not enough to have the permission of the initiator of the debate. He must have the permission of the Minister who is to reply. Does he have that permission?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): I was not informed, but I do not object to the hon. Member speaking in the debate.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to the Minister and I congratulate him on his new office. I am sure that this will be the first of many occasions on which he is here to answer Adjournment debates.

I fully endorse everything that my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon said. He gave us a careful and accurate analysis of the factual and historical background to the discussions about the format for Prime Minister's questions. As he said, one of the consequences of the change has been to reduce by half the opportunity for the Leader of the Opposition to question the Prime Minister. I regret that, because that questioning has been an important part of exchanges in the House twice a week for many years. The change is not one for the better.

Mr. Tyler: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that in any case, the arithmetic of the House has changed the status of the Leader of the Opposition, as there are now three major parties in the House? Do not the new arrangements rightly reflect that change, by recognising the fact that the leader of the third party should have more opportunities than he had in the past?

Mr. Yeo: As the hon. Gentleman has raised the point, I can tell him that the third party now has about a quarter of the number of seats that the second party has, yet is being allowed two thirds of the opportunities to ask the Prime Minister questions. Had the previous arrangements remained in force, it would have had one third of the opportunities, so even that was disproportionately weighted in favour of the third party. The arrangements are now enormously weighted in its favour. Clearly that change is welcome to the third party, but it is in no way justified by the change in the parliamentary arithmetic.

[Mr. Yeo]

My quarrel is not so much with the nature of the changes, which could have been the subject of a debate, as with the manner in which they were announced.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): The hon. Gentleman said that the change was in no way justified, but does he acknowledge that as the Leader of the Opposition now represents only half as many Members as he did before, it might be appropriate for him to have half the number of opportunities at Question Time?

Mr. Yeo: The tradition in the House has been to allow the Leader of the Opposition, whoever he is, whichever party he represents, and almost regardless of the number of seats, to ask questions. I am thinking of the House in 1983, when the Labour party had only slightly more seats than the Conservative party has now. No one in any party in the House then suggested that because the Labour party had suffered a severe setback at the general election, its opportunities to ask the Prime Minister questions should be reduced.

However, all that is to some extent beside the point. The issue here is the way in which the decision was taken and announced, without consultation with any Back Bencher. I regret that, as, I think, do many Members on both sides of the House.

When the Minister replies, he could be very brief, although I shall ensure that he gets his 15 minutes—I think that that is usually the length of speech prepared for a Minister replying to an Adjournment debate. The most useful thing that he could do would be to acknowledge that on this occasion an inexperienced Government and Prime Minister made a mistake.

The matter could be largely put right by a forthright apology. It is nothing to be ashamed of if mistakes are made when there is a new boy in the job. Questions in the House, whether to the Prime Minister or to any other Minister, are important, especially for Back Benchers.

In the present era, the Minister without Portfolio and his Government thought-police are hellbent on controlling every utterance of Labour Back Benchers. I do not know how long that control will be effective—I doubt whether it will last until 2002—but for the time being it remains, so it is Back Benchers from the various Opposition parties who are most affected by the change.

It has already been agreed between the two sides of the House that the total number of questions asked by Back Benchers has not been reduced; I do not suggest that it has, although the immediacy of those questions is certainly reduced by the change from two sessions to one. However, given that, with their huge majority, it is clear that the Government ultimately have the power to force through any change in parliamentary procedure that they wish, it is an act of extraordinary arrogance for the Government and the Leader of the House to make such a change without consulting even one Back Bencher on either side of the House.

Coupled with the way in which the Leader of the House has acted ruthlessly to prevent debate on large chunks of the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill, those actions do not bode well for the health of parliamentary debate or of democracy. They certainly do not sit easily with the Government's repeatedly proclaiming their commitment to openness and accountability, and their wish to be the servants, not the masters, of the people.

I believe that the Minister's reply could be brief. He could simply say, "Yes, we were wrong. Yes, we are sorry—and now we shall engage in a belated process of consultation."

12.43 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): As I have not yet had the privilege of speaking from the Dispatch Box as a member of the Government, nor with you in the Chair, Mr. Martin, I first extend my congratulations to you. It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you formally.

I shall set out the Government's position unequivocally. Put simply, it is that the procedure report did not win general acceptance, that changing the rota for oral questions is an administrative matter, as I shall go on to substantiate, that the change needed to be introduced without delay—carrying out a widespread consultation, as the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) suggested, would have been virtually impossible—that the structure of Prime Minister's questions can be reviewed by the Select Committee on the modernisation of the House of Commons, and finally, that the new system is far better than the old.

The House will be grateful to the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) for giving us the opportunity to debate one of our most important procedures. In previous Parliaments, the right hon. Gentleman played a distinguished part as Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, as we all know. As he said, his total service in that role amounts to 14 years. His speech introducing the debate showed evidence of a wide knowledge and of long experience of all aspects of the procedure of the House.

In recent years there has been considerable dissatisfaction with the way in which Prime Minister's questions were conducted. That was felt not only outside the House, where many people watch the event live on television, but inside the House. The former Prime Minister made it clear several years ago that he thought that the time could be used more productively.

Responding to that desire for change, the Procedure Committee carried out its inquiry. Its report, and the evidence on which it was based, made a valuable contribution to the debate, and I am sure that the House is grateful to the right hon. Member for East Devon and his colleagues on the Committee for the work that they put into that report.

The Committee's main recommendation was that instead of tabling open questions that gave no idea of the subject that the questioner wished to raise, the 10 Members successful in the ballot should have to table a substantive question the day before. The Committee made a respectable case for that proposal but, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pointed out at the time, doing away with open questions altogether would cause controversy.

As the right hon. Member for East Devon will agree, there will always be controversy about suggested procedural changes in the House. The Conservative Government at the time did not accept the recommendation, which does not seem to have won the support of the House as a whole, either.

As the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) reminded us, it was the Conservative Government who prevented proper and open debate on such matters. If he reads column 631 of *Hansard* for 11 July 1996, he will see that the Procedure Committee's report was tagged on to a debate at that stage in the parliamentary process. It was the Conservative Government who prevented debate, not a lack of willingness on the part of the then Labour Opposition.

The previous Government were in no hurry to act on the recommendations of the Procedure Committee. The Committee's report was not debated for a year, and then only as part of an Adjournment debate on the subject of parliamentary procedure. In that debate the former Leader of the House, Tony Newton, made clear his reservations about the suggested change, pointing out that it would make it more difficult to put topical questions to the Prime Minister.

The new Government took office on 1 May with a manifesto commitment to modernise the House of Commons, and in particular to make Prime Minister's questions more effective. As a first step in that direction, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House announced on 9 May that there would be one half-hour session of Prime Minister's questions every week, to provide further scope for covering more issues in depth.

That did not require a change in Standing Orders, only a change in the rota for oral questions. The right hon. Gentleman will appreciate the fact that the rota needs to be settled before the State Opening of Parliament, so that when the Table Office opens that morning, Members will know which Ministers will answer questions on which days. The sensible course was, therefore, to move to the new arrangements right from the start, rather than cause confusion by changing the rota half way through the Session. Members who say that they are not necessarily against the changes we have made but complain that they should have been consulted first—such as the hon. Member for South Suffolk—ought to recognise that, in the circumstances, that was impracticable.

Governments of all political persuasions have changed the questions rota from time to time in response to changes in ministerial responsibility and other factors. This Session's rota would in any case have been different from last Session's to reflect the Prime Minister's decision to bring together the Departments of the Environment and of Transport under the Deputy Prime Minister, and to create the new Department of International Development.

The Prime Minister's place on the rota has been changed several times before. Way back in Mr. Gladstone's time, questions to the Prime Minister were taken last; then at question No. 51; then at question No. 45; then at question No. 40 on Tuesdays and Thursdays; and then at 3.15 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The changes we are discussing mean that the Prime Minister still answers questions for 30 minutes each week—just as the Prime Minister did before.

Mr. Mike Hall: One of the criticisms from Opposition Members concerns the lack of consultation. Yet two years ago, the Prime Minister announced his intention to improve Prime Minister's Question Time. He consulted the electorate on this proposal, and my hon. Friend will agree that he is right to make the change.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Prime Minister has made clear repeatedly his intention to make the House more in tune with the needs of the 21st, rather than the 19th, century. As a result, he received a ringing endorsement from the electorate on 1 May. That should be borne in mind by Opposition Members.

Sir Peter Emery: The Minister listed the historical changes made to Prime Minister's Question Time. The records show that those changes were all made following consultation with all parties. The present change was made without such consultation. Labour's manifesto—which, for greater accuracy, I looked up this morning—says:

"Prime Minister's Question Time will be made more effective".

Most people believe that that comes about by the open-ended question, and not necessarily by any alteration in timing.

Mr. Kilfoyle: If the right hon. Gentleman bears with me, I will show how increased effectiveness is offered by the new arrangements for Prime Minister's Question Time. I would argue that, far from being a diminution of the rights of Back Benchers, our changes will give Back Benchers greater opportunity to put questions to the Prime Minister and will therefore make them a far more effective mechanism within the House.

The other change, which was made with the agreement of Madam Speaker, is that the Prime Minister no longer refers back to the earlier question about his engagements. Instead, the hon. Member tabling the question goes straight to his or her supplementary question without any preliminaries, which were pointless, repetitive and difficult for members of the public to understand. This sensible reform was suggested by the Committee in its report, and I see that the Chairman of the Committee, the right hon. Member for East Devon, is nodding. The change will open up what happens in this House to a less esoteric audience than Members of Parliament.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has moved quickly to propose the creation of a new Select Committee to consider the modernisation of the House of Commons. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for East Devon for indicating his support for this idea when he spoke in the debate on the eve of the spring recess. I hope that the new Committee will review the changes introduced by the Government to Prime Minister's Question Time, and it may wish also to look at some of the other reforms that have been suggested, such as doing away with open questions altogether and reducing the period of notice required for specific questions. The House will then be able to look again at Prime Minister's Question Time, if it wishes, with the benefit of advice from the Select Committee and with greater experience of the new format.

It is a little early to draw any conclusions, since Prime Minister's Question Time this afternoon will be only the second to be held under the new arrangements. None the less, I believe that it is instructive to compare Prime Minister's Question Time on 21 May with what happened on the last two such occasions in the last Parliament.

[Mr. Kilfoyle]

On 18 and 20 March, a total of nine Back Benchers were able to put supplementary questions to the Prime Minister. On 21 May, 18 Back Benchers were called. On 18 March, the House reached only Question 3 on the Order Paper, while on 20 March we did not get past the first question. On 21 May, the House finished at Question 10.

On 20 March—as has been pointed out—the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), the leader of the Liberal Democrats, was called once. On 21 May, he was called twice, enabling him to go into his chosen topic in greater depth. That was one of the reasons for making the change to a half-hour session. Even more importantly—although this is not something which can be proved with numbers—I think that every hon. Member who was present would agree that the tone of Prime Minister's Question Time on 21 May was infinitely more positive and constructive than in the last Parliament. I am sure that it will do much to raise the standing of this House in the country at large if we can continue in this spirit throughout the Parliament.

Unfortunately, the right hon. Member for East Devon could not resist some jibes at the expense of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. First, he said that when my right hon. Friend was the Leader of the Opposition, he took up a disproportionate time during Prime Minister's Question Time. I may be alone in my recollections, but I seem to remember that the orchestrated interruptions by the then Conservative majority prevented the proper conduct of Prime Minister's Question Time and, on occasion after occasion, prevented my right hon. Friend from presenting his case and asking questions in an orderly fashion. Thankfully, because of a new approach from the new Government, that will no longer obtain.

Secondly, I find farcical the suggestion by the right hon. Gentleman that the Prime Minister is afraid to come here to answer questions, given the mandate that he and the Government have been given. I reject that out of hand. We have to get away from such jibes, and members of this Government will try to do so in a responsible fashion.

I was sad to hear the right hon. Member for East Devon state that we were conducting the government of this country like a banana republic. That was a gratuitously offensive remark about a new Government who have come in at a rate of knots to effect changes that we set out clearly in our manifesto, which, I repeat, gained a ringing endorsement on 1 May.

Mr. Yeo: Is the Minister suggesting that merely because a commitment has been contained in a manifesto, the need for subsequent parliamentary scrutiny and consultation about the details of implementing the proposal is removed? If that is the case, it is a very serious threat to this country.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I am not saying that at all. First, we are a responsible Government who want to bring the procedures of this House up to speed with the demands of the 21st century rather than the 19th. Secondly, it is self-evident that the Prime Minister and the Government were given solid support by the electorate on 1 May for making those necessary changes.

I assure the right hon. Member for East Devon that the Prime Minister is just as accountable to the House as he was before; that he answers questions for as long now as he did before; that a question which could have been put to the Prime Minister before can be put to the Prime Minister now; and that all the new arrangements can be reviewed by a Select Committee of this House. I am sure that the new format for Prime Minister's Question Time is a considerable improvement on the old. I believe that this view will be shared by right hon. and hon. Members of all parties in increasing numbers.

GPs (Sunderland)

12.59 pm

Mr. Bill Etherington (Sunderland, North): I congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your appointment. I have already done so privately, but I take the opportunity to do so formally, on the record, and I wish you all the best in the years ahead.

I am pleased to get the chance to have this debate today, because it is no exaggeration to say that the subject is the most important one that I have dealt with in my five years in the House. It is the cause of considerable concern to my constituents and to various people in the medical profession.

I have a little difficulty, because I must praise both the British Medical Association, in the form of Dr. Patnaik, who has sent me quite a lot of information, and Clare Dodgson, the chief executive of Sunderland health authority, who has done likewise. The trouble is that their figures do not quite coincide.

The one thing that is certain is that the average number of patients registered with a general practitioner in the country as a whole is about 1,800. In Sunderland, the worst figure suggested by the BMA is an average of 2,400 patients. That is a long way above the national average—one third or 33⅓ per cent. extra. Even the lower figure suggested by Sunderland health authority, 2,200, is about 22 or 23 per cent. above the national average.

The position is exacerbated by the fact that, according to the last survey that I read about the general health of the nation, Sunderland was in the bottom five health authorities for the state of the public's health. A GP in Sunderland has many more patients than he or she should have, and those patients are generally in a poorer condition. That term may sound impersonal, which I do not mean it to be, but that is the reality.

The problem is not new. It has been known about since the early 1990s. Indeed, in 1994, when the health authority published its services review, the whole thrust was to take work away from the secondary sector and put it back into the primary sector. In other words, everyone seemed to think that it was a good idea to try to reduce the work load at hospitals and pass it back to GPs.

At that time, many people warned the health authority that doctors could only just manage with the work load that they had then, let alone an increased load. At that time, the local medical committee, general practitioners, consultants, Sunderland community health council, local Members of Parliament—including my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who has been vociferous on the issue—patients and many individuals expressed concerns and proposed alternative views but, unfortunately, as probably happened in many other areas, the health authority chose to ignore them.

We warned at the time that crisis point would be reached in the service if something dramatic was not done to address the problem. Unfortunately, the resources that were supposed to be made available to augment and strengthen the primary sector relied on diverting money saved by a reduction in costs in the secondary sector. Three years on, we find that no resources have been moved from one sector to the other. Indeed, Sunderland health authority has stated publicly that the rundown in hospital facilities will, if necessary, be reduced until such time as the primary sector can deal with its problems.

In their manifesto, the Government stated that there would be a Minister responsible for equalising the service that people can expect from the health service regardless of what part of the country they live in. It is not my intention to deliver a long tirade about what might or might not have been done. I am sure that everyone in the health sector recognises the problem, and endeavours have been made to improve the situation, but I am concerned when I hear about trying to take work away from GPs and give it to nurse practitioners, because I have not met a single member of the public who is in favour of that. If we want nurse practitioners to do doctors' work, they should be properly trained and paid as GPs.

I must give credit to the GPs in Sunderland. The burden that they have and the disadvantages that they are working under are such that they must be really good people, or the service would have collapsed long ago. I know of no place in Britain where the GP:patient ratio is worse than in Sunderland.

The health authority thinks that it has done all that it can. We might disagree at times about the best way forward—for example, I should like the career start scheme, allowing a young doctor to work in the area without the financial obligations of having to buy into a practice, which has been successful in Durham, to be tried in Sunderland.

In addition to the current shortfall, there is not a single GP under 30 years of age working in Sunderland. The average age is almost 48, and the preponderance of people working in the service are in the 50 to 55, or 55 to 60 range. We even have four doctors who are between 65 and 70. With no disrespect to them, it should not be necessary for doctors to work after they are 65; there should be enough young doctors coming in to allow them to retire while they are still in reasonable health themselves.

I want the Minister to contact the people on Sunderland health authority, try to come up with some new ideas, and perhaps appoint someone independent to consider the problem. No matter how hard the health authority is trying—and I give it its due—it is not having any effect and the situation is not improving. The citizens have a right to say that it is a Government responsibility to take the necessary action, to ensure that all areas have an equal health service.

For me, the problem is the No. 1 priority in the health care sector in my constituency and in the Sunderland area as a whole. I get a little depressed when I find that the health authority intends to spend scarce resources on litigation to try to force Northumbrian Water to put fluoride in the water, when the vast majority of the public do not want that.

It is even more depressing that the local hospital, which for many years—most of the century, as far as I am aware—was called Sunderland district general hospital, decided a few weeks ago to change its name to Sunderland Royal hospital, which will no doubt lead to extraordinary costs and will not result in one more patient receiving treatment or any improvement whatever for health service patients.

I know that the Minister knows the Sunderland area well, and worked there at one time, and I wish him well in his new post. I hope that he will be able to see his way clear to trying to bring some relief to my fellow citizens

[Mr. Bill Etherington]

in Sunderland, because the situation is extremely worrying; from being manageable, it could suddenly become completely unmanageable.

When a couple of doctors retired in the middle of 1985, more than 1,000 of my constituents were struck off from the practice and had to find somewhere else. People have to travel all over the town. People are now only rarely able to go to surgeries within walking distance of where they live. So bad is the situation that the health authority employs someone full time to find places for citizens on doctors' panels. That cannot be a satisfactory situation. We need something doing, and urgently. Whatever measures are required to bring it about must be taken. It does not matter who takes them.

I hope that the Minister will be more effective than his predecessors over the past four or five years. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South and I twice met Ministers in the previous Government. We have had numerous meetings with the local health authority; we have met the regional health authority. I do not doubt that there is plenty of good will, but we are not getting any movement. This is going to be a good test of our new Government in view of our commitment to improving the health service and reducing bureaucracy to get more patients treated.

1.10 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I am glad to have the opportunity to reply to this debate, which I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Etherington) on securing and which is important to his constituents. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) also takes an active interest in the recruitment and retention of general practitioners in the city.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North rightly said, he and I have a great affinity for Sunderland, which is a great city. I spent two years working to keep the Sunderland shipyards open. I therefore have a great deal of sympathy with the points that he raised, and I thank him for raising them in such a considered way. I listened carefully to what he said about his and his constituents' concerns about the situation in Sunderland. Those concerns are shared by the Government. I especially realise that Sunderland has faced considerable challenges in relation to the high work load on existing GPs and the problems of recruiting new doctors.

People in Sunderland deserve the best possible primary care services. Sunderland needs such services because of the situation that my hon. Friend described. There are high levels of mortality and morbidity, and real problems of social deprivation and poverty that have wholesale health implications. In that respect, I understand that Sunderland is engaged in a programme of urban regeneration and that the health authority is actively involved in a range of partnership initiatives with the city council and other organisations in an effort to promote healthier life styles, create job opportunities, improve housing and so on. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that those engaged in such activities are to be congratulated on their efforts; we wish them well. I hope that he also agrees that the new Government's approach on job creation, housing and public health will be of direct benefit to those local efforts.

In addition to that general activity, Sunderland health authority, which is responsible for providing services in the area, is actively trying to redress the situation. It has taken several positive steps to promote recruitment and retention of GPs. I know that my hon. Friend recognises the commitment of the health authority chairman, the chief executive, to whom he paid tribute, and their colleagues on the ground to doing what they can. I was also pleased that Sunderland has at least made some efforts to listen to the views of the local community using the King's Fund citizens jury initiative, which highlighted several issues including making greater use of multidisciplinary teams working in primary care.

I have read carefully the information that has been supplied to me about the progress that has been made in Sunderland, in trying to address some of the problems that my hon. Friend described. I was particularly struck by one initiative, the new out-of-hours emergency centre in the city, which is staffed by the deputising service and tries to relieve the out-of-hours work load on GPs. As my hon. Friend knows, that service became fully operational on 1 March last year. I understand that a recently completed evaluation by Sunderland's local medical committee showed it to be a great success. Patient satisfaction with the service was high, and a further survey of GPs in Sunderland has shown that a significant number of doctors would be willing to work sessions in a modern primary care centre. In the light of that progress, two further such centres are being opened in the city. I hope that those developments will make Sunderland more attractive to young doctors.

My hon. Friend knows that there have been other initiatives, and highlighted one that he would like to be imported from a neighbouring area. I shall ask Sunderland health authority to explore that possibility. I want to build on those local efforts by pursuing policies nationally that I believe will help tackle Sunderland's GP recruitment problems. As my hon. Friend knows, Sunderland is an extreme case, but there are pockets of similar problems in other parts of the country. We intend to do what we can to take action to resolve them. I shall briefly describe some of the measures that are in hand.

In the short time that we have been in government, I have, precisely because of the concerns that have been expressed by my hon. Friend and others, begun to consider in detail recruitment and retention issues in general practice. Family doctor services are the bedrock of the national health service. The Government believe that there is a need for overall work force policies that will attract high-calibre students into general practice. In the light of that view, I was concerned, as I said last week, by recently published figures that show that the number of GP trainees fell by more than one fifth over the decade between 1986 and 1996.

While the falling number of GP trainees is a cause for concern, the issue cannot be seen in isolation. My hon. Friend made some important points about the relationship between the primary and secondary care sectors. We must ensure that we do not consider such issues in isolation, but take a holistic view of the national health service and the range of services that it provides. I intend to look carefully at how primary care is provided, how to get the balance right between secondary and primary care and how to encourage the work force to reflect that balance. We are aiming to integrate medical work force planning more closely across the primary and secondary sectors,

so that in future the number of GPs and the number of hospital doctors will be considered together rather than in isolation. We shall talk to the medical profession about all those issues.

We want to consider flexible working patterns to provide opportunities for change that address the needs of the work force while providing high-quality services for patients. We shall seek the views of the profession on what employment opportunities would better suit their needs and how any such needs could be addressed.

We shall also consider opportunities under the National Health Service Primary Care Act 1997 for health authorities to improve the level and types of services that family doctors may provide. We shall also look at other options within the existing national contract, such as whether a salaried doctors' scheme within the existing framework might provide some answers, particularly in areas with recruitment difficulties, such as Sunderland. I know that many health authorities have already explored that option, but have found several legal obstacles to its implementation. I shall consider ways in which we might move forward as soon as possible.

We also realise the importance of retaining GPs and attracting back into practice qualified practitioners, especially the increasing proportion of female GPs. My view is extremely straightforward. The health service needs to develop much more family-friendly policies, if we are to recruit people into medical practice and retain them. The world has moved on and the medical profession is no longer a male bastion. With an increasing number of women GPs and doctors comes a need to consider flexibility so that their careers are no longer artificially moulded by outdated practices. I shall look carefully at that.

I shall also examine how general practice retains its work force. We need policies that provide sufficient opportunities for doctors who wish to take career breaks but to retain skills so that they can re-enter general practice at a later date. In considering the needs of the work force, we shall also consider the effect on services. We need to ensure that we continue to build a strong family doctor service in which quality is the watchword.

I believe that access to primary care services is a patient's fundamental right in the NHS. At the risk of repeating a point that was made by my hon. Friend, it may be worth giving just one statistic that will help to put the position in Sunderland into the national context. Average GP list sizes have been falling throughout the country, in some cases dramatically—by about 9 per cent. They stand now at an average of about 1,800 per doctor. The average list size in Sunderland is at least 2,200. I know that there are arguments about whether the health authority and the British Medical Association have got the figure right, but as my hon. Friend says, there is real anxiety that list sizes in Sunderland are much greater than in other parts of the country. Sunderland is working hard to improve that ratio while not compromising quality.

I know that there have been discussions with the Medical Practices Committee of the BMA, which controls the distribution of GPs throughout England and Wales, to ensure that entry into general practice in Sunderland is planned to give the best services possible in the areas of greatest need. If my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North would like to submit evidence to me about the extent of the problem, if he thinks that the health authority has not quite got the measure of the problem, or if my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South would like to do so, I shall take a personal interest in what they have to say.

I shall ask Sunderland health authority to identify the steps that it considers necessary to tackle the problems that my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North described. I shall take a personal interest in its response. I do not think that the problem persists for lack of trying to deal with it on the part of Sunderland health authority. It has embarked on a wide and impressive range of initiatives. My hon. Friend says that it has not cracked the problem. That may be true, but it has operated in a national environment that has not been conducive to attracting doctors into general practice or retaining them.

It has become crystal clear to me in the past few weeks that there is real concern among GPs about their work load and the continual public pressures that they face. We shall have to deal with that. I know that there is particular stress and pressure in Sunderland, but it is fair to say that GP morale in the country as a whole is not what it was or should be.

Mr. Etherington: The fact that the number of patients per GP has dropped nationally at a time when the opposite has happened in Sunderland emphasises my point. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his offer to listen to representations from me and my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). We shall certainly take advantage of that and arrange an early meeting with him to put our views to him privately.

Mr. Milburn: I am always happy to oblige. It might be useful for us to do that. I shall ask Sunderland health authority to report on and assess as quickly as possible the initiatives that it has taken. As public money is involved, it is important that when new initiatives are set in train, a full evaluation is made of the action that has been taken and whether it has been successful. I shall also ask the health authority to describe in more detail the steps that it considers should be taken in future. We want to help as much as possible.

I give my hon. Friend an assurance that I shall take a personal interest in the issue. I also give him a more general assurance that the Government are determined to ensure that patients in all parts of Britain receive the GP services that they deserve.

Youth Crime

1.26 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I add my congratulations to those of others on your appointment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before I go further, I need to declare an interest that I shall record in the Register of Members' Interests. I still serve as a local authority councillor in the London borough of Sutton. I shall make some references to Sutton and some initiatives that the council is taking.

It is appropriate that we are talking today about youth crime, given the early disclosure last week of the 1996 international crime victimisation survey. Whatever the official figures reveal about increases or decreases in crime, there can be no doubt that 18 years of Conservative government have produced a high-crime society. No Home Secretary or Government can be proud of that fact. The House cannot be satisfied or, indeed, safe, until we have taken steps to reduce crime and the fear of crime.

Crime and the fear of crime affect the vulnerable in our society—the elderly, ethnic minorities, disabled people and women. Fear imprisons victims as surely as prison bars imprison offenders. It is important to bear it in mind that the most likely victims of crime are young people between the ages of 19 and 25.

I wish to draw attention to a soundbite that was used before the general election by the then Opposition, now the Government. "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime," was the cry of the present Home Secretary when he was in opposition. I shall seek some reassurances today that one part of that equation has not been lost. Some statements since the election have made me fear that it might have been; that the transition between opposition and government has led the Home Secretary to drop the reference to being tough on the causes of crime. I strongly believe that simply to deal with the effects of crime—with its aftermath—is not an adequate response.

I have no doubt that the Home Secretary is sincere when he talks about being tough on crime, but I urge Ministers to do all that they can to move away from the rhetoric and soundbites of the previous Home Secretary. The rhetoric failed to deal with the causes of crime and was unlikely to do anything to change criminal behaviour.

On the face of it, there is little to oppose in the Government's emphasis on the idea of zero tolerance. However, that strategy fails to address the reality and clutches at what appears to be just one solution to a complex set of problems. I stress that crime is not susceptible to soundbite solutions. We need to attack crime and the causes of crime from as many different directions as possible.

When in opposition, the current Home Secretary paid a number of visits to the United States, in particular New York, to look at the initiatives taken there. Those visits certainly helped to reinforce the image of an iron Home Secretary in waiting. From the further evidence taken from other American cities that have tried the zero tolerance initiative, it is clear that they have not delivered as great a reduction in crime as that recorded in New York. Moreover, other American cities have achieved even bigger reductions in crime without deploying the zero tolerance tactics.

I understand from professionals in this field that one plausible explanation for the reduction in crime in New York is the reduced use of crack cocaine. That drug dependency causes many people to commit crime to feed their habit and causes violent and dangerous behaviour. Many professionals, including many of our senior police officers, do not believe that zero tolerance alone is the solution to our crime problems.

I believe that what is necessary for success is to focus not just on the consequences, but on the causes of crime. We need a sophisticated, well-researched and successfully implemented strategy to tackle crime. It should be backed up by practical action carried out in partnership. Partnership is a much used word, indeed, it is becoming one of the buzzwords of the 1990s, but for some of us it has been the foundation of practical action for many years. To that end, I should like to recommend a report published by James Morgan, entitled "Safer Communities". It was commissioned by the previous Government and published in 1991.

There is no better case for the need for partnership in tackling youth crime than that presented in the report. Sadly, it has been left on the shelf to collect dust because of a lack of political will to see it implemented. That report includes the following two recommendations:

> "As the provider of a range of services which directly impact on the causes of crime (such as education, housing and recreation) the local authority is a natural focus for co-ordinating, in collaboration with the police, the broad range of activities directed at improving community safety . . .
>
> in the longer term local authorities, working in conjunction with the police, should have a clear statutory responsibility for the development and stimulation of community safety and crime prevention programmes, and for progressing at a local level a multi-agency approach to community safety".

I hope that when the Minister responds he will say that the Government intend to enact those recommendations in their crime and disorder Bill so that local authorities are given the statutory force to develop community safety strategies.

My local authority, the London borough of Sutton, has already taken the Morgan report recommendations to heart. In 1993, it appointed a community safety officer and it established a formal partnership with our local police and probation service. In 1994, that group produced a community safety action plan with the clear objectives of reducing the level of crime, lessening the fear of crime and creating a safer environment for community life to flourish.

That first community safety action plan contained 29 specific projects, which were all completed within the designated two-year period. It is important to note that it is not just statutory agencies that are involved in the plan. Our partnership stretches well beyond that to include the voluntary and business sectors, to ensure a genuine strategic approach in Sutton.

The 1994 and 1996 community safety action plans related to youth crime. Those innovative and imaginative schemes, which have been implemented in partnership, have been successful and produced a real reduction in crime. Although one can cast some doubt on the recorded statistics on crime, I believe that the largest reductions in reported crime in Sutton are as a direct result of the council's initiatives.

If the Government are serious about reducing crime committed by young people, we need to understand what drives them to become offenders in the first place. If young people are the problem, they must also be part of

the solution. That means that young people should be included and consulted when identifying the issues, deciding the strategy and taking action.

Sutton's concern about crime stems from a particular group of young people who committed a large number of burglaries, mostly from retail premises, in my constituency. Back in 1992, they had the effrontery to leave calling cards that read, "999". Unfortunately, their fame was increased out of all proportion due to my predecessor's predilection for generating newspaper headlines. The more that that group of young people breathed the oxygen of publicity, the more crime that they, and other young people who imitated them, started to commit.

In June 1994, my council commissioned some research to find out young people's attitude to crime in order to establish why they committed such acts. That study was undertaken by young people who had been trained in counselling and research. They spent time out on the streets speaking to individuals and gangs of young people. That research showed that although the crimes were committed by a small number of young people, a large proportion of them used a range of drugs which contributed to their criminal behaviour. As a result of that research, the council funded and promoted the Sutton youth awareness programme—YAP. That organisation provides services such as one-to-one counselling and treatment and advice to young people using drugs as well as other substances such as solvents and alcohol. It also set up a programme of preventive workshops in schools and offers training and consultancy for staff who work with young people.

An outreach programme was also established in 1996. It is training a large number of young people to work in outreach teams on the streets with the aim of reducing the level of substance abuse and engaging young people in purposeful activities in their local community.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I declare an interest as a recorder of the Crown court and a former acting metropolitan stipendiary magistrate. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on initiating this important debate and I agree whole-heartedly with him about the need to tackle the causes of crime. From my experience, I believe that a great proportion of youth crime is connected with drugs and alcohol. Does he agree that the more work that can be concentrated on that problem, the greater the prospect of improvements?

Mr. Burstow: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's good point. I am keen to stress that we need to do more to deal with the problems of solvent abuse and other forms of drug abuse.

I should like to describe how the initiatives taken in my area have borne fruit. A local shopping centre, Stonecot Hill, suffered from a number of minor crimes, which caused a considerable amount of damage to the premises of local retailers. In the spring of 1996, the council called a meeting of those businesses, which was also attended by the local police and representatives of the probation service as well as youth workers and representatives of the Sutton youth awareness programme.

As a result of that meeting, a strategy was agreed to increase the number of police officers patrolling the area. Outreach staff have also started to talk to young people hanging around the streets. A graffiti project has been successfully implemented to engage those young people in productive work. The probation service, through its community services programme, has cleared up the area and painted and made repairs where necessary. Local traders suggested where murals might be painted and the first was completed in March 1997. The outreach teams have spent time with the young people for the past six months. Drug information and advice services have also been offered to young people, and those with more acute drug dependency problems have been referred for more extensive counselling and support.

The council is also supplementing that initiative with the introduction of a closed circuit television camera at the local shopping centre, which is connected to the local control centre. It is important to note that that strategy has focused on the causes of crime, and in recent months the crime level has fallen to zero. In addition, it has helped to upgrade the area. It has brought together the traders and statutory agencies, who have agreed a programme of action. It has also diverted a significant number of young people from drifting into a life of crime and has prevented the inevitable spiral that leads to more serious offences.

So far, I have described initiatives for young people on the verge of crime, but it is vital to try to work with those young people who have already fallen over the edge. One scheme in which my local authority of Sutton has become involved in recent years is the youth at risk programme. It was the second local authority to engage the youth at risk team. The team works with some of the most difficult children in our society and it has now run three programmes targeting persistent young offenders in Sutton. They are intensive programmes: residential courses are followed by a nine-month programme of training and one-to-one support. The programme was described in *The Observer* as

> "the kick start of a radical, 9 month programme to turn their (the lives of some seriously dysfunctional children and young people) around . . . Like Michael Howard's Boot Camps this is a relatively new idea from the United States. But boot camps are about tough punishment. Youth at Risk is about tough love."

Young people involved in the initiative are able to reveal their backgrounds and experiences—many for the first time. The initiative often reveals very damaged children who have been abused, sexually and physically. Many of them have been through the care system and many have never experienced normal family life and the love of parent or parents. I do not say that to seek the House's pity for the children and I do not wish to pretend that the youth at risk programme turns them into angels—it does not. But it makes a difference to their lives and, as a consequence, to the communities in which they live.

In National Volunteers Week, I want to pay particular tribute to the dedicated partners who play a part in the youth at risk programme. The volunteers allow the programme to succeed. We should pay tribute to them for riding the incredible roller-coaster of emotions involved in the programme.

The youth at risk scheme has delivered positive results. It has shown that a large number of children with such problems in Sutton and other parts of the country can be diverted from offending—it has substantially reduced the level of offending. Many young people move back to employment or return to school as a result of the programme.

[Mr. Burstow]

I do not believe that it is enough simply to address the problem of young offenders; we must also work with the victims of crime. In Sutton, the council has recently completed a survey of young people as victims of crime. It produced interesting findings which I have had the opportunity to study in the past few days. More than 1,000 young people responded to the survey; more than two thirds of them said that they had been the victim of crime. More than 20 per cent. of women had been subjected to sexual harassment. Some 33 per cent. of black respondents and 61 per cent. of Asian respondents said that they had been the victims of racial harassment.

I wish the Home Secretary and his ministerial team the best of luck in tackling the legacy of the Home Office team in the previous Government. I hope that the Home Secretary and his team will not pander to the right-wing dogma that believes that prison works. A rising prison population is not a sign of success, but an admission of failure. Of course we need prison for serious and violent offenders, but the fact that 90 per cent. of young teenagers who are sent to prison are reconvicted within two years shows that that system is clearly not working.

For every £50 that the Government spend today on catching, prosecuting and imprisoning a criminal, they spend just £1 on trying to prevent the crime in the first place. That is a bizarre sense of priorities. While the Home Secretary and his team are putting the finishing touches to their zero tolerance plans, I ask them to consider the many examples, some of which I have given today, of crime prevention and multi-agency projects where councils and voluntary organisations have worked with young people and delivered results. If the Home Secretary, Home Office Ministers or Home Office staff want to see for themselves the success in Sutton, I invite them to the borough to talk not just to those who run the projects, but to the young people themselves.

In this debate I have tried to highlight the success of programmes that the Liberal Democrats have introduced in my local authority area. I have done so not to praise my colleagues in particular, but to persuade the Home Secretary and his Ministers that being tough on crime also requires action on the causes of crime and action to engage young people in positive activity rather than to lock them away. Prisons, while necessary, only seem to prepare young people better for a life of crime. This country needs to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime.

1.44 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): I was delighted by the compliment paid to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), when he used the words that my right hon. Friend made famous when he was shadow Home Secretary. The words are considerably more than a soundbite: they stand the test of time, which is why they are being used now, several years later, just as the hon. Gentleman has done. They can be unpacked and tested for their meaning, which is basically what the hon. Gentleman has done in today's debate.

I welcome the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam to the House. I am having to say that more than once as many of us in the House became used to responding to his predecessor's contributions—contributions which were different in tone and nature from the speech that we have heard today. I welcome the constructive and positive way in which the hon. Gentleman has approached the topic. His manner invites positive engagement, which I am happy to undertake.

In making his initial remarks, the hon. Gentleman said that he was drawing on his continuing experience as a local authority member in Sutton. It is right that he should do so—all of us bring our experiences to the House. For two years after I entered the House, I continued as a city councillor in Cardiff. I drew on that experience as well as the experience that I gained when I chaired the juvenile bench in Cardiff and when I worked with young people for many years before entering Parliament. All my experiences have informed my debates. As I worked in and represented local areas, I also saw crime at its worst and saw how it affects and damages the lives of individuals, families and communities. We must consider the problem of crime as a whole in order properly to understand and tackle it. The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise the importance of tackling youth crime—as well as the importance of tackling crime generally and the fear of crime.

I have also spent the past few years as the Labour representative on the board of Crime Concern, where I worked alongside the former Member of Parliament, Sir Ivan Lawrence. Between us we made some interesting contributions to those meetings.

I was glad to hear the hon. Gentleman emphasise the balance to be struck between being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. I can assure him that I have no doubt about either side of that equation. I am glad that he accepts—everyone should—that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will be tough on crime. My right hon. Friend is equally keen to be tough on the causes of crime. The hon. Gentleman will see that balance in everything that we do.

The hon. Gentleman referred to zero tolerance. I think that that idea is sometimes misunderstood or subjected to an alternative interpretation. One interpretation of zero tolerance amounts to intolerance. Another interpretation means not allowing things to drift—one takes note of the first pane of glass that is broken instead of waiting for many panes to be broken, or one takes note of and does something about the first piece of graffiti instead of waiting until the town is covered with it. It is that sort of interpretation that is important.

It was interesting when the chief constable of Thames Valley, Mr. Charles Pollard, expressed his reservations recently about zero tolerance which, he said, could end up with conflict on the streets, particularly in those communities that are most suspicious about police motives and actions. He went out of his way to stress that he agreed with the sort of zero tolerance argued for by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) shortly before the election. Many other senior police officers have supported that sort of approach.

The evidence from the United States must be treated with caution. Many lessons can be learnt—indeed, last year I spent time looking at policing in Chicago, Washington and Baltimore. The example that impressed me most was Baltimore, where the city authorities, led by a vigorous, young, black mayor, thoroughly supported the chief of police's view that they should reclaim

communities so that there would be no no-go areas, the recreation areas would not be taken over by drug pushers and a sense among young people of seeing the police in a positive role would be encouraged and developed.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does the Minister agree that the real problem with the policy of zero tolerance is that many people involved with tackling youth crime tend to feel that it leads to zero understanding of why young people become involved in crime in the first place? That, in turn, leads to zero respect and creates a vicious circle.

Mr. Michael: Yes, I do see that. Some people do not want to understand what is happening. They should listen to the detail of what is being said, which brings us back to the phrase, "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime." One of the causes of crime is a general feeling that nobody cares very much—it does not matter what happens and slight misbehaviour does not matter—which runs on into worse behaviour and more serious offences. A proper understanding should lead people, whether they want a policy of punishment, one of prevention, or a proper balance between the two, to the message contained in the phrase, "zero tolerance", which is that we should not put up with increasing levels of crime and bad behaviour and a feeling of being unsafe in one's home or on the street. That is the message that needs to be got across and understood.

Mr. Burstow: The Minister may have partially addressed the point I planned to raise, but I shall build on it nevertheless. In a sense, zero tolerance has already been defined in a way that does not coincide with what the Government say it means; it is open to misinterpretation or misunderstanding. In the past, it has been misunderstood and applied in a way that might even have led to riots in this country. Will the Minister consider other ways of describing the strategy and tactics involved, so that the Government do not risk being misunderstood when they talk about zero tolerance?

Mr. Michael: In the mother of Parliaments, it is right that we should look at the way in which we explain our policies and try to find better ways of expressing ourselves, but there is a definition of zero tolerance—the one that I have described—that is clearly understood and that has elicited a positive response from both the police and the public. That is the concept on which we need to work. We must get across the idea that one can do something about crime and disorder, that communities can be reclaimed and that the partnerships between the police and local authorities to which the hon. Gentleman referred can be built.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the importance of the Morgan report, which was published by the previous Government and not so much left gathering dust on a shelf as buried deep under a large pile of earth. The previous Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), was unable to mention local government without becoming increasingly sibilant and looking rather frustrated. It is clear that it is not simply a matter of giving a duty or responsibility to local authorities, because, as in Sutton and in most parts of the country, local authorities have moved on and already accept that they have that duty and responsibility. That acceptance has been driven by the experience of crime among councillors and the people who have been to see them and by the fact that there is now a lot more crime around than there was even when the Morgan report was published. Current levels of crime are unacceptable.

In Croydon, where one of my new colleagues, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies), was a leading member of the council when it became a local authority, a speedy move was made to put community safety and working with the police high up on the agenda. We have reached the stage at which local authorities and the police recognise that the issue is important to both of them and that a partnership approach has to be developed.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam was right to say that "partnership" is easy to say, but hard to put into effect. Personal partnerships have to be worked on—they do not just happen—and that is also true of partnerships between the police and local authorities. Such partnerships must involve both parties together identifying problems of crime in their area, together identifying the strategies needed to tackle those problems and together delivering that strategy. It is also important that the partnership is between the police, the local authority and the local community, which includes not only the resident community, but voluntary organisations and the business community.

I join the hon. Gentleman in saying that it is appropriate that we are discussing this issue during volunteers week. Yesterday, I took the opportunity to join the Women's Royal Voluntary Service for a session of pouring tea—*[Interruption.]* I shall be happy to give the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) a demonstration later if he likes. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam referred to volunteers contributing to their local community, perhaps by recognising the need for a youth club in the area, or the need to confront local youths about their behaviour and find more positive activities for them and for younger children so that they do not start to get involved in the pattern of crime.

I can reveal that the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border and I spent some time together this morning in a way of which even the Liberal Democrats would approve. We were going through the applications for the Prudential youth action awards, the result of which will be announced in July. I hope that they will engender a great deal of interest, because we saw improving standards in the entries and creative responses to the problems that were being tackled. Young people themselves were identifying problems such as bullying or drugs and coming up with solutions to those problems in their local area.

When other young people talk to children about such problems, it is far more convincing than when those of us who are well over the hill are talking—almost from the beyond the grave—and telling them what to do. Young people have a power among those younger than them within their generation—say, a couple of years younger—that is extremely important. Without giving away any secrets regarding the results of the awards, I was particularly impressed by the way in which many of the applicants were looking forward to developing what they had learnt while doing this year's project. That is an excellent example of a widening pool of young people who understand, not only that there is a problem, but that they are part of the solution. We will be making progress

[Mr. Michael]

if we as a society can encourage young people to be a part of the solution, as the Prudential youth action awards do, and encourage them to feel that they can do something about the nature and quality of the community in which they live.

I have concentrated on responding to the points raised by the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, but I came prepared to make some other remarks because it is important that the debate should be balanced. There are problems with crime that have simply not been tackled. We have proposed community safety orders, whereby we can tackle the problem of neighbourhoods being plagued by continual anti-social behaviour, perhaps by a family or a group of families. The persistent harassment of a community can devastate people's lives and that is why we have proposed that local authorities and the police should be able to seek this new order from the courts. The order will be addressed to a named individual or individuals and focus on behaviour that has caused distress or fear to neighbours. Those named in the orders will be told clearly what it is they must not do or where they must not go. The trigger for harassment and bad behaviour may well include racial antagonism and the order could help in such circumstances.

That is an example of a problem that has not been addressed in recent years, yet as soon as we started to talk about it, hon. Members on both sides of the House said, "Yes, there is such a family on one of my estates," or, "I have heard complaints about this sort of thing." The police and local authorities have not had the equipment to tackle the problem and we hope to put that right in our crime and disorder Bill.

Above all, we want to speed up the youth justice system. The scandal was identified by the Audit Commission last year, but those of us who have had any association with youth justice have known of the problems for far longer. It takes far too long for youngsters who have been caught to be brought before the courts and punished. That sends out all the wrong messages—it tells young offenders that nobody cares, that nothing much will happen if they misbehave. Repeat cautioning had the same effect. We have to tighten up the system so that, as with one's own children, young offenders are punished today—not tomorrow or in six months' time. We need to introduce that sense of urgency to the way in which we punish young people when they go wrong, as well as trying to prevent them from getting involved in crime in the first place or diverting them quickly if they do start down that path. Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

COMMITTEE OF SELECTION

Ordered,

That Ms Charlotte Atkins, Mr. Clive Betts, Mr. Ian Davidson, Mr. Fraser Kemp, Mr. Andrew MacKay, Mr. Patrick McLoughlin, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. George Mudie and Mr. Paul Tyler be members of the Committee of Selection.

That the members of the Committee of Selection nominated this day shall continue to be members of the Committee for the remainder of this Parliament.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House until the end of the present Parliament.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Civil Service (Legislation)

1. **Dr. Tony Wright:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has for civil service legislation. [519]

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Dr. David Clark): As the House knows, this Government are firmly committed to a wide-ranging constitutional reform programme and, as part of that, I shall be working with colleagues to take forward our commitment to give legal force to the civil service code.

Dr. Wright: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and welcome him to his post. He will know that the need to protect the integrity and independence of the civil service under the previous Government led to the present civil service code, following a recommendation by the old Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. He made an extremely welcome announcement just now that he will introduce an Act that will incorporate the code and give the civil service a new statutory footing.

Dr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for those kind words. I read with care the code, the debate and the fifth report of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I feel that any legislation must reinforce and reiterate the essential values and features of the civil service, which of course include integrity and impartiality.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I add my congratulations to the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment. Does he agree that a most distinguishing and distinguished feature of our civil service is its political impartiality? Will he ensure that, while he holds his present office, nothing will be done to compromise that in any way?

Dr. Clark: I can give the hon. Gentleman that categorical assurance.

Mr. Beith: Can the Minister assure the House that the mentality of the general election has entirely left the Labour party? Were the Government to be run on the basis on which the general election campaign was run by the Labour party—that internal dissent should be suppressed—it would certainly not be for the good of the country. It is therefore important that political advisers do not take over the traditional role of senior civil servants in protecting that impartiality.

Dr. Clark: The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point when he talks about special advisers, and it is right and proper that I make the point from the Dispatch Box. The rules under which we are operating for special advisers are the same as those that have been applicable, basically, for the past 25 years. There is one small exception relating to three separate appointments which, by Order in Council, were given special powers. That was done because we felt that it was right and proper that we should be open and transparent with the House, because those were grey areas which had been areas of difficulty in the past.

The key point is that the whole process is intended to reinforce the political neutrality and integrity of the civil service.

Mr. Heseltine: The right hon. Gentleman says that he intends to stick to the practice of 25 years. How does he square that statement with the suggestion that the Prime Minister's principal private secretary is to be an apparatchik from the Labour party—Mr. Jonathan Powell? Will he tell the House, in the interests of open government, that in the event of that appointment taking place, the views of Sir Robin Butler will be published and made available to the House?

Dr. Clark: I am afraid that, yet again, the right hon. Gentleman has got hold of the wrong end of the stick. The Prime Minister has made it clear that Mr. Jonathan Powell is his chief of staff—a position that existed previously in Mrs. Thatcher's early years in office—and that Mr. Powell will not take on the position of principal private secretary. That post will remain in the mainstream of the civil service. The rules were laid down by the Prime Minister and he is sticking to them.

Mr. Heseltine *rose—*

Madam Speaker: I call Mr. Radice.

Mr. Radice: I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post. Is it not the case that there are very few more special advisers under this Government than there were under the previous Government? Unlike the previous Government, however, we are making sure that political advisers are political appointments at No. 10, rather than suborning career civil servants and using them as political playthings, as Mrs. Thatcher did.

Dr. Clark: My hon. Friend, who has a great deal of knowledge on the matter, having chaired for several years the Select Committee that dealt with it, is right. In no way are we taking any action whatever to impugn the political integrity of the civil service—exactly the contrary. As regards numbers, we have never hidden the fact. We said clearly during the election that a strong independent source of advice was needed for strategic thinking in No. 10. At a departmental level, under the previous Government, there were about 38 special advisers; under this Government there will be about 44—not a great difference.

Mr. Heseltine *rose—*

Hon. Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is entitled to two questions. This is his second question.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Order. It is my choice whom I call. I have made it clear that the right hon. Gentleman is entitled to two questions. This is his second question.

Mr. Heseltine: I am sure, Madam Speaker, that the whole House will welcome the fact that the Government cannot silence you, no matter how much they try to silence everyone else.

Will the right hon. Gentleman make it clear that the principal private secretary to the Prime Minister—a civil servant—will in no way be answerable to Jonathan Powell?

Dr. Clark: It is quite clear that the principal private secretary to the Prime Minister is a career civil servant and he is responsible to the permanent secretary of the civil service, who is head of the civil service in that professional capacity. There is a clear distinction of roles.

Civil Service (Management)

2. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to improve the management of the civil service. [520]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service (Mr. Peter Kilfoyle): We are committed to a modernised, high-quality, efficient and customer-focused civil service, and we wish to mobilise the talents and creativity of civil servants at all levels to achieve that.

Mr. Morgan: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and congratulate him on his appointment. Does he agree with me, as one of the small band of ex-civil servant Members of Parliament, that during the previous Government, under the pressure of contractorisation, market testing and privatisation, many wrong macho management practices were imported from the private sector into the British civil service? Does he agree that the new Labour Government must do their best to continue the drive for efficiency through benchmarking and other means, but must restore the public service ethos to its rightful place in the civil service?

Mr. Kilfoyle: The watchwords of the new Government towards the civil service will be to make it accountable, accessible, responsive and more efficient. With regard to training and development, we have already reinforced the civil service commitment to Investors in People, the national standard for the effective training and development of all an organisation's staff. We are acutely conscious of what has happened to civil service morale, and we look forward to working with civil servants to improve morale.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new post. Will he try to answer the question that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has already been asked twice? Will the principal private secretary have to report to the chief of staff; and will the latter control access to the Prime Minister? If that is supposed to represent better management of the civil service, we clearly disagree.

Mr. Kilfoyle: I endorse everything that my right hon. Friend has said. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman address his comments to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, if he gets the opportunity.

Intestacy

3. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will review the current practice in which the estates of those who die intestate in the County Palatine revert to the Crown. [521]

Dr. David Clark: The Law Commission, in its 1989 report "Family Law: Distribution on Intestacy", recommended no change to current legislation. I have no plans to suggest a review of the law on intestacy.

Mr. Prentice: Are not many aspects of the Duchy weird and wonderful throwbacks to the middle ages—none weirder than the fact that the estates of people who die intestate in the County Palatine revert to the Duke of Lancaster? Is there not a powerful case for opening up the Duke of Lancaster's benevolent fund to include people who are elected as councillors instead of just the lords lieutenant, the sheriffs and all the other appointees whom we are fed up with?

Dr. Clark: I am persuaded that my hon. Friend has made a very pertinent point. The Government have committed themselves to more transparency and openness; in that spirit I intend to look at the composition and openness of the board of trustees of the Duchy benevolent fund. As part of that process, I invite representations from right hon. and hon. Members whose constituencies fall within the County Palatine.

Citizens Charters

4. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement about the future of citizens charters. [522]

Mr. Kilfoyle: My hon. Friend, like my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn), represents a city that was instrumental in pioneering charters. We will be relaunching the programme as part of our drive to modernise and improve government. It will be based on the needs of the people who really count—the users of public services.

Mr. Bayley: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about the city of York inventing the idea of citizens charters. Does he agree that the citizens charter was brought into disrepute by the former Government's refusal to report annually on whether targets had been met, and by their failure to give the public decent means of redress when services fell below the necessary quality? As part of his review, will my hon. Friend take the opportunity to consult local authorities with a good track record on customer contracts and quality of service, and the public—for whose benefit the charter was originally developed?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We shall of course consult all interested parties during the charter programme review. Special emphasis will be given to the people with the greatest interest in the matter: the users of public services. We intend to hold the fullest possible consultation, including organisations that have a particular interest in delivering the best possible services to the people of this country.

Mr. Rowe: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that a significant number of public services in Kent have

achieved a charter mark for excellence and that, far from what the hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley) said, the Conservative Government deserve the highest congratulations on having introduced this extremely efficient way of meeting consumer expectations? Will the Minister give a solemn undertaking that charters will be developed in a way that will enhance services, just as they have so effectively done hitherto?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We fully intend to reinforce and extend the use of the charter mark. There are at the moment 645 proud possessors of the charter mark—it is not easy to obtain—which shows that those organisations have achieved very high standards.

There is a great deal of suspicion that the previous Government were more concerned with subterfuge than this Government intend to be. We will be open, we will consult and we will develop the charter mark. I hope that many more organisations in the public domain will apply for a charter mark in future.

Mr. Barry Jones: Will my hon. Friend give an example of an improved service in local government?

Mr. Kilfoyle: There are many examples of improved services in local government, including some in the much maligned city of Liverpool—my home city. My hon. Friend will find that organisations as diverse as ambulance and hospital services have applied for—and successfully gained—a charter mark, reflecting the very high level of service they provide and their commitment to their customers.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the assurance that the charter mark will be kept. However, having seen it in operation in my constituency—I congratulate two of the hospitals in my constituency that achieved it—will there be a guarantee that standards will be maintained and that pressures of finance will not militate against them?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We will aggressively insist on maintaining the very highest standards. The charter mark, remember, is not for ever. Anybody who fails to meet the standards will have their charter mark taken away.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration

5. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals his Department has to improve the civil service publicity relating to complaints procedures with particular reference to the role of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration. [523]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government will seek ways to improve publicity in relation to complaints procedures generally, and in particular to the parliamentary ombudsman's role.

Mr. Connarty: I am happy to welcome my hon. Friend to his ministerial post and to note that the new Government place importance on an open complaints procedure to give the public confidence in the performance of public sector departments. Will my hon. Friend give a specific example of what the Office of Public Service has done to make people aware of the role of the parliamentary ombudsman? Will he also consider changing the title to "parliamentary ombudsman", because no one knows what the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration does?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Being the party of open government, I can reassure my colleague that any suggestions to improve service are welcome. In terms of what we have done, the Office of Public Service booklet, "The Ombudsman in your Files", was recently reprinted and distributed in response to a recommendation from the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

Freedom of Information

6. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to issue the White Paper on freedom of information. [524]

Dr. David Clark: I hope to publish a White Paper on freedom of information before the summer recess.

Mr. Hanson: I thank my right hon. Friend for achieving a Labour party manifesto objective so early in this Parliament, in producing the White Paper. Will he ensure that there is full consultation of all interested parties on this document, but ultimately that it leads to more open, more effective and more accountable government in the form of legislation at an early date?

Dr. Clark: The freedom of information Act will change profoundly the whole governance of Britain. It is important that we get it right because it will be a landmark Bill. There will be the fullest consultation possible at every level, not only on the White Paper, but on the draft Bill which we hope to publish early in the new year.

Mr. Fabricant: If the Labour party is indeed the party of open government, why is the Minister not sticking to his manifesto commitment to publish the Bill this Session?

Dr. Clark: It is very important that we get the Bill right, because, I repeat, it will change profoundly the whole of the political culture of this country. If we are to get it right, if we are to have an all-singing, all-dancing Bill, it is right and proper that we have the fullest possible consultation from all parts and from all opinions in the country. By following that process, I believe that we will get a very wise and sensible Act of Parliament.

Mr. Derek Foster: I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post and welcome very much his robust statement about freedom of information. Does he agree that the Scott report revealed not just a few Ministers behaving badly but a culture of secrecy and dissembling endemic in the system, and that freedom of information legislation is absolutely essential to deal with that? Will he undertake to bring that forward in the next Queen's Speech?

Dr. Clark: I thank my right hon. Friend for his kind remarks and for the benefit of his considerable knowledge

of this subject. We have a clear manifesto commitment to openness and transparency on arms exports and that will be reflected in our freedom of information Act.

Mr. Burstow: Given the Government's commitment to comprehensive rights for disabled people, in drafting the White Paper will the Government give due regard to the needs of disabled people in terms of access to information?

Dr. Clark: Yes, I can give that commitment. One reason we wanted a decent period of consultation was so that we could hear the views of the widest cross-section of people.

Public Services (Value for Money)

7. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what measures he intends to take to ensure value for money from public services. [525]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government want to achieve high-quality public services which are efficient and focus on people's needs. We have already made a start by setting up the comprehensive spending review. That will examine ways to make better use of resources and root out inefficiency in public spending.

Mr. Evans: I am delighted to learn that the Government are trying to attack public spending on public services, but are they sending the right message to the public—that they will obtain the best public services—when, at the very top, the civil service, political appointments have increased from 38 to 53? Is not that a massive increase? Do we know whether it will stop at 53, or will there be yet more political appointments in the civil service? In the spirit of openness and transparency—in which the Government believe—will the Minister confirm that Sir Robin Butler has not said that he is "seriously unrelaxed" about the number of political appointments that have been made within government?

Mr. Kilfoyle: Not for the first time, the premise on which the hon. Gentleman bases his question is wrong. The message going out from the Government to the British people concerns accountability, accessibility, the responsiveness of government and a drive for greater efficiency. That is why, since 2 May, we have announced not only a comprehensive spending review, but a review of the private finance initiative and the public-private partnerships. We have also announced measures on the electronic delivery of Government services, the Department's efficiency plans and that we will reconsider the agency targets for Ministers. That is the message that is going out from a Government who are gearing up for the 21st century, unlike the previous Government who were geared to the 19th.

Mr. Pike: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment. Will he make it a priority to ensure that quangos and training and enterprise councils, which were stacked with Tory nominees by the previous Government, are made more accountable and that they give value for money?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall reconsider the whole system of appointments to quangos, their necessity and the principles of accountability as part of a full-scale review which my right hon. Friend has already announced.

Mr. Grieve: As the hon. Gentleman is concerned about open government and public spending, will he undertake to publish the salaries of all the new special advisers with whom the Government are stuffing the Whitehall machine?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We shall follow exactly the usual procedures in publishing the range within which those individuals are employed and paid.

Civil Service (Ethnic Monitoring)

8. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to ensure ethnic monitoring in the civil service. [526]

Mr. Kilfoyle: All Departments and agencies are required to monitor the ethnic origin of their staff and applicants. My Department publishes an overview in the civil service data summary.

Monitoring data are used to identify where barriers exist and action is required. Information on resultant initiatives is published in the equal opportunities progress report.

Mr. Vaz: I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend on his appointment. He will know from the statistics that have been published by his Department during the past few weeks that there are no black and Asian people in senior positions in the civil service, and we are talking about hundreds of such posts. What does my hon. Friend intend to do to tackle that apparent cultural discrimination in the recruitment and selection procedure of the British civil service?

Mr. Kilfoyle: We are monitoring the civil service equal opportunities policy. Indeed, there is a requirement to monitor it. I have to make a comparison with the working population at large. Ethnic minority representation in the civil service, at 5.5 per cent., compares very favourably with that in the economically active population in Great Britain as a whole, which stands at 4.9 per cent.

Citizens Charter

10. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to reply to the third report of the Public Service Committee on the citizens charter (HC 78 of Session 1996–97). [528]

Mr. Kilfoyle: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley), we will relaunch the charter programme. We will respond to the Committee at a time agreed with the new Chairman, after he or she has been appointed.

Mr. Gunnell: The Select Committee called for genuine dialogue between providers and users of public services in order to carry forward the charter process. May I be assured that my hon. Friend will include dialogue between providers and users for each charter that is developed

further? Will he ensure that such dialogue will inform the award of charter marks so that they bear some relation to the experience of users of services?

Mr. Kilfoyle: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that we will consult widely and properly with all interested stakeholders, including the users of services and those who offer advice, such as the National Consumer Council and citizens advice bureaux.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: In the interests of accountability to the citizen, will the hon. Gentleman conduct a review of the number of policy reviews that are being undertaken by the Government? He will, I think, find that endless policy reviews are a recipe for governmental paralysis, not proper government of the country.

Mr. Kilfoyle: The number of reviews that are having to be undertaken by the new Government is a reflection of the inertia displayed by the previous Government, particularly towards public service.

Freedom of Information

11. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he intends to publish a freedom of information Bill; and if he will make a statement. [529]

Dr. David Clark: I intend to publish the White Paper on freedom of information before the summer recess.

Mr. Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer and I welcome him to his position on the Front Bench. Will he ensure that when he publishes the White Paper and produces the Bill, which will bring about tremendous change for the people of Britain, the legislation will be retrospective so that people can see what the previous Government did during the past 18 years? They will then never vote for the Conservatives again.

Dr. Clark: I thank my hon. Friend for his interesting comment. He can rest assured that there will be the widest consultation on the White Paper. That is not, however, all that we are doing in respect of openness. In their manifesto, the Government made clear their commitment to the regeneration of our democratic process. Central to that was the White Paper on new government I announced yesterday. It will set out how we shall deliver accountable, accessible, responsive and efficient government to the people of Britain. Those proposals, alongside our freedom of information Bill, will bring an agenda of openness to government which we have never seen before.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the agenda of openness extend to the publication of the contents of the Excalibur computer so that Labour Members can understand what information is held on it? In this spirit of openness, might it not also be an idea if the information was published in the press so that we could all read it?

Dr. Clark: All the information contained in that computer is published information and it is available under the Data Protection Act 1988.

Release of Documents

12. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to change the criteria determining the release of documents under the 30-year rule. [530]

Dr. David Clark: We will publish shortly a White Paper on freedom of information. I hope that we shall see a considerable extension in the release of public records under the 30-year rule.

Mr. Baker: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many people regard the operation of the 30-year rule as a farce? When documents are released at the beginning of each year, all we tend to find out is what kind of tea and biscuits the Prime Minister consumed 30 years ago. Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake to ensure that far more documents are released, to release them before 30 years and to review all documents currently held to find out whether they can be released?

Dr. Clark: I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's view. As an historian, I know the frustrations involved. The emphasis under this Government will be on releasing, not withholding, information. We have just announced, as evidence of our good faith, that we hope to release a tranche of information relating to the security forces during the first world war.

Mr. Mackinlay: As part of the review, will my right hon. Friend consider with the royal household whether documents held at Windsor and Buckingham palace should be subject to the same rules of disclosure as documents kept in the Public Record Office? Some very important historic public documents relating to public policy are kept in the royal household.

Dr. Clark: In the spirit of openness and transparency in historical records, I shall certainly look into that point.

PRIME MINISTER

Earth Summit

Q1. **Mr. Dafis:** To ask the Prime Minister what are the Government's main objectives for the United Nations General Assembly special session—earth summit II—in New York in June. [547]

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I shall be attending the earth summit in New York on 23 June, along with my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and others. We shall be pressing for action across a range of issues at that summit, including a commitment by this country to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. by the year 2010. That is based on 1990 levels. That is a challenging commitment and demonstrates the Government's commitment to a more green world.

Mr. Dafis: May I suggest that the commitment shown by the Government at earth summit II will be a very important test of the seriousness with which they take the sustainable development issue? May I also suggest that

success at the summit depends on the developed world setting an example on sustainable consumption and its willingness to transfer resources in terms of technology and funds to the developing world? Will the Prime Minister at least give a commitment that he will ensure the reversal of the decline in development aid given to third-world countries that, very ironically, has occurred since the earth summit in 1992?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are committed as a Government to raising the levels of overseas aid, but it has to be done in a way that is compatible with the limits on public expenditure that we have set ourselves. I should say that we shall not simply be undertaking action on carbon dioxide emissions at the earth summit. We shall also be supporting the new convention on forests, which will do an immense amount to reduce the destruction of rain forests. We shall also be pressing for measures against pollution more generally and measures in respect of oceans as well.

I should say, too, that measures are already being announced by the Government in relation to domestic policy, which will have a dramatic impact on the environment in respect not just of an integrated transport strategy but of the new environmental task force, which will enlist the support of young people in cleaning up the environment in parts of the country.

Helen Jackson: Four out of every 10 primary school children in my constituency started the school year in a class of more than 30—

Madam Speaker: Order. The substantive question is about the earth summit and supplementary questions must relate to it.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 4 June. [548]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. Later this afternoon I shall be meeting the President of the European Commission.

Mr. Bruce: In a written answer, the Treasury has just it made clear that, once the cost of living increase is calculated, pensioners will not benefit from the reduction in value added tax on fuel. Why does the Prime Minister continue to insist that pensioners will benefit?

The Prime Minister: Of course pensioners will benefit from the reduction in VAT on fuel. Of course they will: that is precisely why so many of them supported the policy of reducing VAT on fuel. There was probably no more unpopular policy pursued by the previous Government than that of raising VAT on fuel in direct breach of their election commitments. In contrast, this Government, having promised to reduce VAT on fuel, will do so.

Mr. MacShane: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating our sister party in France on the remarkable election victory on Sunday? In addition to working with President Chirac, will my right hon. Friend seize the opportunity of five consecutive years of government to forge a new political entente cordiale between our two countries and instruct Ministers and officials to seek out what unites our two great nations and to put to one side what may divide us? Finally, when my right hon. Friend meets Mr. Jospin tomorrow in Sweden, will he in the name of all English people ask Mr. Jospin to have a word with Eric Cantona and ask him to keep playing for Manchester United?

The Prime Minister: I think that that might be an entente too far. Of course I am delighted to congratulate Mr. Jospin on his victory and I want to work with all our partners in Europe to ensure that we have an agenda for Europe which focuses on the single biggest problem in Europe—jobs. That is precisely why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has today made an important initiative and said that all the European countries should come together to work out how we get the right labour market, the right education and skills and the right infrastructure in Europe to ensure not just that the single market works, but that we can reduce the appalling levels of unemployment throughout Europe.

Mr. Ashdown: Are not the first crucial decisions on monetary union now just weeks away and likely to turn on a choice between relaxation and delay? Which does the Government prefer?

The Prime Minister: What we prefer is the policy that we articulated before the election and continue to articulate now—to keep the options open for this country. We have made it clear that we believe that it is highly unlikely that Britain would want to join the first wave of monetary union. I have also made it clear, as we have always said, that the criteria for monetary union should not be fiddled, fudged or botched in any way. If they are, the answer is not to delay—the answer is not to proceed.

Mr. Ashdown: While I agree with the latter part of the Prime Minister's answer, does he agree that there is a very limited degree of flexibility allowed in the Maastricht criteria, not least on the timetable? Would it not be better if Britain were to accept that and lead the search for a pragmatic solution, and to show the way that that could be done through the leadership of his Government?

The Prime Minister: Of course we should exercise a leadership role, but it is important to have a consistent position and stick to it. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned some flexibility in the criteria. It is important that the criteria are not fiddled or botched in any way, because if that happens the process will not work. We will ensure that that is clear not only here but to our European partners, too.

Miss Melanie Johnson: Does the Prime Minister not find it astonishing that some 100,000 children do not attend their school in England and Wales each day? Will he tell the House what the Government intend to do about that?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a severe problem. Part of the reason why we are committed to action on class sizes and on literacy and

numeracy in our schools is to try to reduce the numbers of children who play truant. My hon. Friend may also like to know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and other Education Ministers are considering better ways to deal with truancy. The great problem for many schools is that they are faced with the choice of keeping children who are unruly and undisciplined, which disrupts the education of other children, or throwing them out of the school, in which case they often end up as a problem for the police and other enforcement agencies in the local community. There has to be a better way to approach the problem. If not, we shall find that social costs mount up, including crime, and those 100,000 young people may also end up later incapable of finding work or working for any length of time.

Mr. Major: Three weeks ago the Prime Minister promised the House that the devolution Bill would be published before the referendum. Can he confirm that that is still the case?

The Prime Minister: The proposals in the White Paper upon which the devolution Bill will be published will of course be published, because it is that upon which the referendum is to be held.

Mr. Major: The right hon. Gentleman perhaps did not hear my question. I asked him whether the Bill would be published. I quote from what he said in answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) some time ago:

"Of course the Bill will be published in time for the referendum, because the referendum will take place on those proposals".

Why has the Prime Minister changed his mind? If he has changed his mind, why did he not have the courtesy to come and tell the House that he had done so? The distinction between the White Paper and the Bill will be well understood both to the House and to the right hon. Gentleman. Was it not a matter of trust that he should tell us?

The Prime Minister: It is absolutely clear—it was made clear before the election and all the way through—that it is the White Paper proposals that will be put to a referendum of the Scottish people. That is entirely sensible, since it is only then, after the referendum has given an affirmative answer, that it is sensible to draw up the Bill, so that we then have the details of the Bill properly debated in the House. That is plainly the sensible way to proceed. As we have said all the way through before the election, and I repeat again now, the White Paper proposals will be there so that everybody in Scotland and Wales knows precisely what is being contemplated.

Mr. Major: The Prime Minister is both wriggling and waffling. For ease of reference, I have the *Hansard* report in front of me and I quote the Prime Minister:

"Of course the Bill"—

not the White Paper—

"will be published in time for the referendum, because the referendum will take place on those proposals"—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c.64.]

Is not the truth of the matter that the details of the policy are still in such a muddle that the right hon. Gentleman cannot yet give detailed instructions to the draftsmen?

The Prime Minister: The proposals to which I referred are the proposals in the White Paper. [HON. MEMBERS: "The Bill."] The proposals in the White Paper. Those are the proposals that we said before the election that we would publish. It is plainly sensible and right, and in accordance with precisely what we said before the election, that we will publish those proposals. Indeed, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland made clear in the debate yesterday, he will publish the proposals in the White Paper before Parliament rises so that Parliament will have the opportunity to debate them. That is plainly the most sensible way to proceed, and we shall proceed in that way.

Mr. Major: Why does the Prime Minister not just admit that he made a mistake in the past and that the Bill is not ready? Why does he not admit that he has been caught with his fingers in the till oratorically? He promised the Bill and he cannot deliver the Bill. Devolution is a constitutional matter, but already the Government have guillotined the referendum Bill so that important parts of it cannot even be discussed and we suspect that they will not even follow the long-established convention of taking the Bill on the Floor of the House. The Prime Minister cannot answer any of the detailed questions that have repeatedly been put to him about that Bill. After one month of government, is that not a contemptible way for the Prime Minister to treat the House of Commons, and is it not becoming apparent that that is typical of the arrogant way in which the Government are beginning to behave?

The Prime Minister *rose—[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: Perhaps I may deal with each of the right hon. Gentleman's points in turn. First—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. The House must now come to order. We must not have this bawling and shouting.

The Prime Minister: The Conservatives have not taken long to slip into the ways of opposition. I can deal with each of the right hon. Gentleman's points. First, we need no lessons on fingers in the till from the Conservative party. Secondly, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland made clear yesterday—and as I repeat today—the proposals will be in the White Paper on which people will be able to vote in the referendum. As for the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill—

Dr. Mawhinney: What about the devolution Bill?

The Prime Minister: The former chairman of the Conservative party must contain himself for a moment. He did not do so during the election campaign, and he is not doing so now. The Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill is simple, containing six clauses and two schedules. The Conservative party tabled 250 amendments, 21 new

clauses and 12 new schedules—and it did so not to assist debate, but to scupper the Bill. I ask the people of this country this: which is undemocratic—a Government using their mandate to propose a referendum to allow the Scottish and Welsh people to have their say, or a Conservative party that wants to prevent the Government from carrying out that mandate?

As for the use of the guillotine—since the Leader of the Opposition raised that—I have done a little research. The last Conservative Government used the guillotine 59 times—six times in advance of Committee stage. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members are saying that the previous Government never used the guillotine on constitutional Bills, but they did so on the Single European Act and, what is more, when they forced the poll tax on Scotland. As a Government, we are implementing the policies upon which we were elected. That is the real difference between us and the Conservative party.

Mr. Major: After all that waffle, I repeat my question to the Prime Minister: why did he promise the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and the House that the Bill would be published, and why has he not now apologised for breaking that promise?

The Prime Minister: My promise was precisely that which we made at the election. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland said yesterday, the promise was to publish the proposals in a White Paper before Parliament rose, and that these would then be debated by the House. That is my right hon. Friend's position, and mine. Opposition Members—with all their shouting and braying—want to stop us carrying out the policies upon which we were elected. We will not let them stop us.

Kate Hoey: Will my right hon. Friend use this opportunity to join all decent people in Northern Ireland in utterly condemning the appalling murder of Constable Greg Taylor at the weekend? How many meetings should take place between Government officials and representatives of Sinn Fein before any decision is taken about when those meetings should stop? How many meetings will take place before a decision is taken that enough is enough?

The Prime Minister: As we made clear when we announced the process of officials of the Government talking to Sinn Fein, it was important that it was subject to events on the ground. That continues to be the case. The Government absolutely abhor—as, I am sure, does the whole House—the murder of the member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It was appalling and totally unprovoked, and was a precise example of the type of random vicious violence that we want to stop. That is why it is so important that we give every impetus that we can to making sure that we carry the talks process forward, but in a way—as my hon. Friend rightly said—that is entirely consistent with the principles that we set out, and it will be.

Q3. **Mr. Day:** Will the Prime Minister confirm that at the time of the abolition of the Stormont Parliament in Northern Ireland, the number of Members of Parliament from the Province was increased to compensate for the loss of that body? Can he therefore explain to the House why he refuses to reduce the number of Scottish and Welsh Members of Parliament accordingly if Parliaments are established in Scotland and Wales? Does he not realise that unless changes to our constitution are equitable and fair to all parts of the United Kingdom, his proposals will strike at the very heart and unity of this United Kingdom, which I hope that all hon. Members hold dear? [549]

The Prime Minister: Of course they must be equitable and fair, but I must say to the hon. Gentleman that our proposals are very similar to those made for Northern Ireland by the previous Government—for a devolved Assembly with legislative powers, but no reduction in the number of Members of Parliament. If the proposals were equitable and fair then, similar arguments can be made in respect of others.

Mr. Sheerman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that 18 years of the Conservative Government's misguided policies have done great damage to city and town centres throughout the country? If so, will he ensure that all his colleagues with responsibility for such matters come together to put the towns and city centres of our country first and produce policies to bring them back to life?

The Prime Minister: I agree with the general objective that my hon. Friend sets out, and we are attempting to do a number of things in that connection. One is the action on crime in city centres, which is tremendously important, allowing people greater freedom both to live and to work there. That is one reason why we have supported so many Labour and other authorities introducing closed circuit television in city centres and other measures that have improved crime prevention there.

It is also important in all those town centres to get the right planning and environment measures and the right transport strategy, which is one reason why my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is so committed to ensuring that we have the right public transport strategy to give people the freedom to go into the town centre and back again.

I would say to my hon. Friend, however, that there are certain elements—the development of out-of-town shopping centres, for example—that accord with what people want to do, so it is important that while doing everything that we can to redevelop town centres, we should recognise that certain patterns of behaviour will remain simply because people want them to remain.

Q4. **Mr. David Davis:** The Prime Minister rightly said that unemployment was one of the major issues facing Europe. He argued in his election manifesto that using the windfall tax to fund the employer rebate would reduce labour costs and that reducing those costs would reduce unemployment. If he believes that, why does he not believe that increasing costs, with a minimum wage, will increase unemployment? [550]

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that a minimum wage will increase unemployment at all. *[Interruption.]* I know that Conservative Members are opposed to the minimum wage, but I say that it is wrong—simply wrong—that 800,000 people in this country are paid £2.50 an hour or less. I do not believe that the right hon. Gentleman would like his wife or his children to work

for that kind of sum. Of course it is important to tackle unemployment, but the whole purpose of the windfall tax, and its advantage, is that it enables us to take a range of different measures, including a subsidy to employers to take on young people who have been unemployed for some time, who can then be given training and skills, giving them the best chance of getting back into the labour market and doing something worth while.

Conservative Members shake their heads and ask how long those people will be employed. I visited a training centre in Southwark the other day.

Mr. Duncan: Well done.

The Prime Minister: I think that it is quite important to see what steps are being taken in local communities. A whole range of those young people, some of whom had been unemployed for long periods, had the chance for the first time to make something of their lives, as a result of the skills and training that they were getting, particularly in new technology.

We want to reduce the appalling levels of structural long-term unemployment, not just here but throughout Europe. If Conservative Members do not join us in that endeavour, it shows how out of touch they are.

Q5. **Mr. Canavan:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that the death toll from last year's E. coli outbreak in central Scotland has reached 20 with the tragic death of an elderly woman in my constituency at the weekend, making it the most severe outbreak of that strain in the world? Given the more recent outbreak at Falkirk district royal infirmary, which affected more than 30 people, and the fact that its source has not yet been identified, will my right hon. Friend order early implementation of the recommendations in Professor Pennington's report and order the highest form of public inquiry—not a fatal accident inquiry, but a fully fledged public inquiry presided over by a senior Scottish judge—to get to the root of the matter? That is what we demanded in opposition and that is what we expect now that we are in government. [551]

The Prime Minister: I entirely share and understand the concern about that issue. We shall, of course, consider the recommendations of Professor Pennington and then consider what further action needs to be taken. I assure my hon. Friend that everything that can be done will be done. It is sensible to do that in the light of whatever Professor Pennington has recommended. In addition to dealing with the particular outbreaks of E. coli in Scotland, we will set up an independent food standards agency, which will give us a far better chance of reducing such outbreaks in future.

Q6. **Mr. Wilshire:** When President Clinton and a real first lady had dinner with the right hon. Gentleman last Thursday rather than at Buckingham palace, did the right hon. Gentleman take the opportunity to explain why members of Her Majesty's Government have taken to referring to the wife of the British Prime Minister as Britain's first lady? Will he take this opportunity to instruct his Ministers to stop this arrogant practice? [552]

The Prime Minister: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that opposition has certainly not improved the Conservative party. I do not know anyone who is doing that. We are very content with the present position. In relation to insulting the wives of politicians, whether here or abroad, the more they are kept out of the whole thing, the better.

Q7. **Ms Squire:** Does the Prime Minister agree that the Eurofighter aircraft is vital to Britain's future defence needs, to the future success of Britain's defence manufacturing industry and to the 40,000 jobs directly and indirectly involved in its production? When he meets Chancellor Kohl in Germany on Friday, will he emphasise the importance of the Eurofighter project and urge him to ensure that Germany signs the production agreements without any further delay? [553]

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I shall certainly urge that we proceed with the Eurofighter project. As my hon. Friend knows, our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is at this very time trying to do that with his German counterparts. The Eurofighter project is immensely important for Britain. It is important for defence reasons because it is the multi-role aircraft that we need for our future defence requirements, but it is also vitally important for jobs, technology and skills. Some of the most highly skilled employees in the country will be working on the project. It is ready to go into its production phase, and we will do all that we can to speed up the project.

Mr. Cash: Given what the Prime Minister said about the connection between jobs, unemployment and the fudged criteria under the European Union treaty, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Maastricht criteria have already clearly failed on those matters? Will he go to Amsterdam, as I repeatedly asked our previous Prime Minister, to renegotiate the treaty and deal with the question of economic and monetary union in the interests of all the people of the whole of Europe, including the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: All that I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that I hope that he does more good for me than he did for the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). In respect of the hon. Gentleman's question on jobs, we shall simply be saying that we have to focus on how we improve the labour market, its flexibility and the employment of people within the labour market—as it is a different labour market today—and how we take the action necessary to improve the job situation not only for people here in Britain but for people throughout Europe. There are 18 million unemployed in Europe and some 9 million who have been unemployed for more than a year. That is precisely one of the reasons why we are taking action here. We want to put unemployment right at the top of the agenda for Europe as well. We shall be doing that, of course, at Amsterdam, but we shall be doing it beforehand as well in talks with other countries.

Q8. **Mr. Winnick:** I raised the Stephen Lawrence case in the previous Parliament. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is of interest that those who were named by the *Daily Mail* as responsible for the brutal killing of that

17-year-old youth have not taken any action to clear their names? When is justice and the rule of law going to prevail in this case? Is it not disgraceful that that youth was put to death, those responsible have been named and no action has yet been taken to ensure that the murderers of Stephen Lawrence are put in the dock? [554]

The Prime Minister: I of course understand—indeed, I deeply share—the concern that my hon. Friend has raised, as I believe that we all do. When he raised the matter previously in the House, it was made clear by the then Prime Minister and by all of us how much we wanted to see justice done in this case. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is to meet Mrs. Lawrence shortly. We shall do everything that we can—consistent, obviously, with the proper rule of law, because that is the way in which it must be done. I entirely understand the frustration that people feel. It was an appalling and brutal murder and no one has been brought to justice for it. There is a deep sense of injustice within the local community that that should be so. I hope that people understand that we shall do everything that we can within the rule of law to rectify that injustice. The meeting that my right hon. Friend is to have with Mrs. Lawrence is one step in doing that.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Are you able to confirm that it is still the practice in the House that if an hon. Member on either side believes that he has been misreported in the *Official Report*, he is entitled to ask the Editor for a correction, and that if the Prime Minister believes that the *Hansard* reporter, in all innocence, heard the word "Bill" when he was meant to hear the words "White Paper", it is open to him to ask the Editor to correct the record?

Madam Speaker: I have to concern myself with the principle. If any hon. Member believes that he has been misreported, of course it is up to him to take it up with the Editor of *Hansard*.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During Prime Minister's questions today, reference was made to the atrocious murder of a police officer in Northern Ireland at the weekend. It may not be within your knowledge that a number of persons have already been charged with that murder. Was it in order that that matter should be raised on the Floor of the House today?

Madam Speaker: Had it not been in order, I would have stopped the hon. Lady proceeding. I believe that the point that she made was perfectly in order.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. During questions today, the shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster asked two supplementary questions on a single question on the Order Paper. I have not seen that happen once in my 18 years in the House. It has happened in Prime Minister's questions, and perhaps even on one occasion in Deputy Prime Minister's questions under the previous Government. Did we see a procedural change introduced today?

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has not seen a procedural change. The right hon. Gentleman was entirely correct in putting two questions if he wished to do so. He decided to ask two supplementary questions under one question, and that was perfectly in order. He can ask two questions and no more. It is up to me as Speaker to determine whom I call and when.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. You will undoubtedly have seen on the tapes a report from the Foreign Secretary to the effect that international military intervention in Sierra Leone has not been ruled out. That is a clear implication that international military intervention may take place. May I ask you whether you have had any request for a statement on such a matter? If not, is it not right that the House should be informed before the Foreign Secretary makes such statements, which might involve British military forces?

Madam Speaker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is perfectly accurate. Statements of such a nature should be made to the House in the first place. In answer to his first question, I was not aware of what he has obviously seen on the tapes. I was not informed that a statement would be forthcoming. Of course, there is always the opportunity to raise such an issue by private notice question and I would certainly consider any such request with all seriousness.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you confirm that when we are elected to the House our families are not elected with us? Will you condemn the deplorable trend now followed by the Opposition of mentioning hon. Members' families, insulting them and personalising the debate?

Madam Speaker: I have always totally disapproved of Members' families being abused or cited across the Floor of the House. As long-standing Members know very well, we are elected; we take the brunt; we are answerable, and not any of our families.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. May I ask you to inquire whether it might be possible for the Prime Minister to make shorter responses to questions? Each one of his replies today turned into a mini-Adjournment Debate. That diminishes the opportunities available to those hon. Members on both sides of the House who wish to question the right hon. Gentleman more closely.

Madam Speaker: I am very pleased to inform the House that in this new Session I am watching closely all questions and answers. Every day, the questions are much too long, as are the answers. I keep records and I shall take firm action when I have a full account and all the relevant Departments have been able to answer.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Lest the House may have been misinformed during an exchange at Prime Minister's Question Time, will you advise the Prime Minister that when Northern Ireland's Parliament was set up, the number of Members returned to the House was reduced from some 30 to 12? That is pertinent to the ensuing debates.

Madam Speaker: It is barely a point of order, but it is a point of information.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Further to the point of order of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon)—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been here long enough to know that once a point of order has been responded to, there can be no further points of order on it. If the hon. Gentleman has a fresh point of order, I will listen to it. Perhaps he can think about that, and, if he has, I will come back to him.

Sir Archie Hamilton (Epsom and Ewell): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Do you share my concern about reports that the new political appointees installed at Downing street have not had security clearance? Has the Prime Minister given any indication that he will make

[Sir Archie Hamilton]

a statement to the House to say whether those people have had access to classified information before they were cleared for security purposes?

Madam Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. I have not been told that the Prime Minister or any other Minister is seeking to make a statement on that matter.

Now, Mr. Cohen, do you have a new point of order, fresh in your mind?

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. On the exercise of your powers in relation to questions, should a question apparently contain an insult to a Member's spouse or partner, would you be prepared to intervene to stop that question being asked and reprimand the hon. Member who made such an insult?

Madam Speaker: I have done so on many occasions, but I regard it as important that hon. Members are adult. They should not abuse the family members of those who are elected to the House.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you study *Hansard* on the Loyal Address debate and compare what the Prime Minister said then with what he said in the Chamber today in answer to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition? If it is apparent to you that there are some glaring inconsistencies between promises made by the Prime Minister during the Loyal Address debate and what he said today, will you consider issuing an instruction to the Prime Minister from the Chair similar to the one issued to senior Ministers that Prime Ministers, as well, should not make policy on the hoof?

Madam Speaker: All right hon. and hon. Members who speak in the House are responsible for their own comments and, providing that they are within our parliamentary guidelines, they are not the responsibility of the Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill

Considered in Committee [Progress, 3 June].

[MR. MICHAEL LORD in the Chair]

Clause 1

REFERENDUM IN SCOTLAND

Amendment proposed [3 June]: No. 87, in page 1, line 6, to leave out the words

'and tax varying powers of a Scottish Parliament'

and to insert the words

'of a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers.'.—[*Mr. Wallace.*]

3.39 pm

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): I remind the Committee that we are also discussing the following amendments: No. 111, in page 1, line 6, leave out 'tax-varying'.

No. 145, in page 1, line 7, leave out 'varying' and insert 'raising'.

No. 112, in page 1, line 7, leave out 'Parliament' and insert 'Assembly'.

No. 88, in page 1, line 9, leave out 'papers' and insert 'paper'.

No. 203, in page 1, line 10, leave out '1' and insert

'*(Referendum in Scotland (No. 2)).*

No. 200, in page 1, line 22, leave out from 'certify' to second 'the'.

No. 89, in page 1, line 22, leave out

'for each of the two forms of ballot paper.'.

No. 90, in page 1, line 25, leave out

'for each of the two forms of ballot paper.'.

No. 92, in schedule 1, page 4, leave out lines 3 and 4 and insert

': FORM OF BALLOT PAPER'.

No. 95, in page 4, line 6, after 'Parliament', insert 'with tax-varying powers'.

No. 93, in page 4, line 9, at end insert

'WITH TAX-VARYING POWERS'.

No. 94, in page 4, line 12, at end insert

'WITH TAX-VARYING POWERS'.

No. 76, in page 4, leave out lines 13 to 22.

New schedule 8—*Referendum in Scotland (No. 2)*—

Part 1

FORM OF FIRST BALLOT PAPER

Parliament has decided to consult people in Scotland on the Government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament.

Put a cross (X) in the appropriate box:

I AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT WITH TAX-RAISING POWERS'.

OR

I DO NOT AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT WITH TAX-RAISING POWERS.'.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Last night, as we concluded our deliberations before the 10 o'clock Adjournment, I was discussing the questions that were being suggested by the hon. Members for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

The questions to be used in the referendum on Scotland have, as we all know, taken many forms in the past few months. The right hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Robertson) went through so many twists and turns in reaching a conclusion as to what to present to the Scottish people that one could be forgiven for thinking that he was sitting on a sharp object. Or had ground control finally got in touch with Major Tom and shown him the blade of Excalibur? Whatever it was that brought the right hon. Gentleman to the present arrangement of two questions on one referendum, he was in danger of making the grand old Duke of York look decidedly decisive.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland wants one consolidated question asking electors whether they want a tax-raising Parliament in Scotland. He said that the taxation powers were critical for a Scottish Parliament to give it flexibility and accountability. Certainly, if I were in favour of a separate Scottish Parliament, I would not be content with a Parliament that could not vote its own budget—that is to offer a hungry man a plate, but no food. But that is precisely what the Welsh are to be offered by the Government. If I were a Welsh elector, I should throw it back in the Government's face. The Welsh are being insulted by the Government, as we all are by the Bill and the proposals for a referendum in Scotland and Wales that are set out in it.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Is not my hon. and learned Friend being unfair to the Government, in that they have made it clear that while they will ask in a referendum whether the Scottish people would like to have a tax-raising power in their Parliament, they also promised in the election campaign not to use that power and therefore to ignore whatever is said by the Scottish electors? Surely that is a strange thing for a Government who say that they want to be trusted by the people.

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend is right, but then the Labour party is a strange thing.

There are only two sensible ways to deal with the referendum—I touched on one of them last night. The first is to tell the people what the Government propose—to present the public with the scheme that they recommend. Provided that it has been set out before Parliament, discussed in both Houses, discussed on television and radio and in the press—argued over in all its three-dimensional glory—the public will know precisely what they are being offered.

The public should be asked, "Do you or do you not approve of the proposal for a Scottish/Welsh Parliament contained in the Scotland/Wales Act 1997 or 1998?" I call that the Linlithgow question.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Given yesterday's debate and the persuasive case made by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), would it not be more appropriate to refer to this as the Linlithgow solution?

Mr. Garnier: It would be appropriate to call it the Linlithgow solution if I were the least bit confident that the Secretary of State for Scotland would accept his hon. Friend's solution, but he will not. The Government are not in listening mode.

To talk now of White Papers—or is it a Bill? We have yet to discover. Such talk is disingenuous and intellectually dishonest. To talk of proposals for "a Scottish Parliament" means nothing. Given the timetable motion, we can expect little room for discussion from the Government. The people are entitled to know now—before the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill becomes law—the details of the proposals. Without knowing the details, they are neither informed nor in a position to make a rational judgment.

The second way to deal with the referendum is to ask people whether they want independence. That is the solution preferred by the Scottish nationalists. If the people say that they want independence, it will be up to the people of Scotland to decide on their own Parliament, to set out their own plans for their taxation system and, possibly, if they want to move outside the ambit of foreign and defence affairs dealt with from Whitehall, to settle their own treaties and international affairs. However, the Government have neither the brains nor the bravery to produce anything other than a total mess. We now watch them with amazement that the reputation they were entitled to expect on election by a vast majority is rapidly sifting away. I urge all hon. Members to watch them like hawks.

3.45 pm

Mr. Fallon: There are many amendments in this group, but I wish to speak to amendments Nos. 111 and 112 in my name and the names of my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) and for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Putting the phrase "tax-varying powers" on the face of the Bill as well as on the ballot paper perpetuates a deception that was skilfully cultivated during the run-up to the election. That deception is that the only powers that the new Scottish Parliament will have are tax-varying powers, or that the only powers that matter that the new Scottish Parliament will have are tax-varying powers. That, of course, is not true. We cannot know precisely the total number of other powers that the new Scottish Parliament is likely to have, because we do not yet have the White Paper before us; but, from the very choice of the word "parliament" for the proposed new body and from the previous attempts to establish such a Parliament, we can deduce that the range of powers to be given to the new Parliament is quite considerable.

First, as one would expect of any parliament, there is the power to make law. It is inevitable that when the Government come to consider the detail of their

[Mr. Fallon]

proposals, they will attempt to transfer some law making of some sort from this House to the new Scottish Parliament. Perhaps Scottish private legislation, or those curious Scottish orders that are referred to special commissioners, or some types of Scottish legislation at the later stages of consideration will be transferred or delegated to the new Scottish Parliament. If so, they will be formidable powers, affecting every citizen of Scotland and it may well be that those voting in the referendum will prefer those powers not to be exercised by a new Scottish Parliament.

After all, Scotland already has plenty of government: a Scottish Office, local authorities and a large number of Members of Parliament. Indeed, until we reduced the layer of regional government, it could be argued that Scotland had more government than almost any other country in western Europe.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): An existing layer of government is the Scottish Office. How do Conservative Members plan to hold the Scottish Office accountable to the people it is meant to serve—the people of Scotland?

Mr. Fallon: That neatly takes me on to the second power of the Scottish Parliament, which is its power to hold Ministers, the Scottish Office and Scottish public bodies to account. At the moment, that power is exercised through this House, where Scottish Office Ministers are held to account by all Members of Parliament, whether or not they sit for Scottish constituencies. The Conservative Government strengthened that accountability by ensuring that the Scottish Grand Committee could hold to account Ministers other than those representing the Scottish Office—a welcome innovation. However, some of the people who will vote in the referendum may feel that that power should not be exercised by the new Scottish Parliament. It would all depend on whether the exercise of that power was proportionate to the cost of the new machinery by means of which it was exercised, or whether it simply duplicated the existing arrangements that prevail in the House.

Finally—

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): These questions cannot be answered in any form until another question is answered: to whom will the civil service be responsible? Will civil servants be responsible to the United Kingdom Government, as they are at present? To whom will they owe their prime loyalty? I hate to use the word "masters", because I do not believe that that is the appropriate relationship, yet, in some senses, it is the old problem of serving two masters. Are civil servants to be responsible to the Ministers in a Scottish Parliament? Until that question has been resolved, the issues that the hon. Gentleman properly raises cannot be resolved.

Mr. Fallon: That must be right. It was certainly the case under the previous Government—I know that it seems to have changed now—that civil servants were ultimately responsible to the Crown. It has yet to be established how they will be able to serve two different Parliaments. That reinforces the case for spelling out in more detail in the Bill, in legislation and, if necessary, on the ballot paper what powers those who vote in the referendum in Scotland will be voting for.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Fallon: I will, but I am conscious that others want to contribute.

Mr. Cash: I said yesterday that the role of the Secretary of State is also left in limbo. Does my hon. Friend accept not only that civil servants are servants of the Crown, but that, as the function of the Secretary of State is an indivisible function, that matter must be sorted out? As it is impossible for any one Secretary of State to be distinguished from others, the issue of the relationship between Ministers of the Crown and those who would be representatives in a Scottish Parliament, setting out their policy in that Parliament, will have to be sorted out.

Mr. Fallon: It certainly needs to be sorted out. It would also lead us down the path of exploring the relationship between the Secretary of State, who is accountable to the House, and whoever is chosen to be first Minister in the new Scottish Parliament. However, that might be outside the scope of the amendments that we are debating, so I will not take that path.

The third power of Parliament is the power to grant or withhold supply. However legislation is framed, no system of parliamentary government is constructed without the prospect of granting supply to or withholding it from its Executive. Before any citizen, any resident of Scotland, comes to vote in a referendum this autumn, they will surely want to know exactly what type of supply may be controlled by the new Scottish Parliament and may be granted to or withheld from its Executive by that Parliament.

That matter might affect the funding of every local authority, hospital, school, university and public service in Scotland. There may well be many people in remoter parts of Scotland who will not agree to the granting or withholding of that type of supply, exercised on the whim of a coalition in the new Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, that will, for example, dramatically reduce the moneys available to the councils of the Western Isles or the Shetland Islands.

That is why the powers to be exercised by the new Scottish Parliament must be set out. If they are not to be set out in legislation before the referendum, we are entitled to say that they should be specifically set out on the face of the Bill, as proposed in the Government's narrow phrase "tax-varying powers" in clause 1, or on the ballot paper. If that is impossible, as a last resort it would be better than nothing that those powers be set out in some type of formal literature that is sent to every resident of Scotland before he or she votes in the referendum. That is a proposition which the Committee cannot discuss, because of the way in which the timetable motion has been drawn up.

Unless the powers are specifically set out in legislation, and unless we can assure those who are voting that they know exactly what powers the new Scottish Parliament will have, we are driven back to the solution proposed by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), which we should put before the House again.

How can those who vote in a referendum—this autumn, perhaps—be sure what they are voting for, unless they see in detail the powers that the new Parliament will exercise? When the Minister of State winds up the debate, he should re-examine the phrase "tax-varying powers", and consider the deletion of the adjective "tax-varying". He should at least come clean with the Committee and say that the vote this autumn should be on the establishment and powers in toto of the new Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Donald Gorrie (Edinburgh, West): I want to reiterate the Liberal Democrat position on the Scottish referendum. The position is different in Wales, and our Welsh colleagues will make clear their position.

First, we are against a referendum on Scotland. We believe that the proposal for a referendum was born from panic. The Labour leadership was put in a panic by the former Secretary of State for Scotland. Fortunately, the Scottish voters have a great deal more—if I may use two Scottish expressions—spunk and smeddum than the Labour leadership. They have rejected the attempts of the previous Secretary of State to frighten them and turn them against the idea of a Scottish Parliament. The Scottish voters have shown better sense than the Labour leadership. There is no need for a referendum.

Our position is diametrically opposed to that of the Conservatives, who are against any form of democracy anywhere, especially in Scotland. We believe that the views of the Scots are clear and a referendum would be a waste of time.

Secondly, we are against the second question. We consider it politically inept. However it is written, it will be read by many voters as, "You do want to have higher taxes, don't you?" Those of us who learnt Latin learnt a form of question which called for the answer no. This is such a question. It is written in such a way that people will tend to vote no. It does not state, "If you vote for higher taxes, you will get better schools, better hospitals and so on," which our party put forward in the general election. It merely asks in the abstract, "Would you like to vote for higher taxes?" We believe that that is inept.

Furthermore, as my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) made clear yesterday, the question puts on offer a proposition that no party is putting forward—that is, a Scottish Parliament without tax-raising powers. That is not on the political agenda, so it is wrong to offer it. It also demolishes any moral position that the Government may have for rejecting the nationalists' claim to have their question included in the referendum. Once one starts opening out the scope of the referendum, where does one stop? The second question is foolish and undermines the Government's position.

I shall deal with some of the arguments that we have heard against a Parliament with tax-varying powers. The hon. Member for Linlithgow argued that the existence of borders created difficulties, but there is no problem if a citizen of Connecticut pays different taxes from a citizen of New York state, or if the citizens of two adjacent German Länder are taxed differently. The hon. Gentleman may say that America is a federal country—but that makes no difference to the principle. Denmark, a unitary country, has district, regional and national income taxes. The system works perfectly well; there is no rioting in the streets of Denmark of the kind we had here with the poll tax.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we should not ask the Scottish people whether they want a taxation system different from the one they have at the moment, even though, on his own evidence, there are at least five or six ways in which that could be interpreted?

4 pm

Mr. Gorrie: We are saying that the tax-varying element of the Parliament is an integral part of the whole structure. Hence to ask a separate question about it is idiotic.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The hon. Gentleman proposes that a Scottish Parliament must, of necessity, control an entirely separate fiscal regime from the one applying to the rest of the UK. That seems to imply that a Scottish Parliament must, also of necessity, be economically independent from the United Kingdom Parliament.

Mr. Gorrie: I do not see why it should not be, but it is also possible to have a mixed system, which is what the Government seem to be proposing. We say that, without some control over the money, the Scottish Parliament proposal is fatally flawed.

Mr. Garnier: For some time, it has been Liberal party policy—I do not know whether it still is—to advocate a local income tax, so I can well understand a Scottish Parliament having the power to raise a local income tax that varied from region to region or from county to county. Does the hon. Gentleman, however, agree that the second question is meaningless because the people of Scotland will be invited to answer it with no idea of the true definition of "tax-varying powers"? At the moment, it is just a nice-sounding phrase with no detail behind it.

Mr. Gorrie: By the time voting takes place, a White Paper will have been issued and debated at length. The citizens of Scotland are not all as stupid as English Conservative Members seem to think they are. It would be quite simple for them to say that they wanted a Parliament with some control over money. We are against asking a separate question at all; but if there is one, we shall campaign flat out for a double yes in the referendum, because tax-raising powers are essential.

Conservative Members have raised the chimera that because of a slightly higher income tax in Scotland, people and companies would indulge in a mass emigration to England. That is rubbish. There are already in Scotland at least three pairs of adjacent local authorities the gulf between whose council tax D bands—the standard rate band—is greater than the gulf that would ensue from the imposition of an extra 3p tax on the mythical average taxpayer. Yet there is no mass emigration or immigration—

Mr. Lansley *rose—*

Mr. Gorrie: No, really, I have had enough. The whole argument, like almost everything else the Conservatives have said in this debate, is false.

[Mr. Gorrie]

"Next, various Conservatives and the hon. Member for Linlithgow have argued that because Parliament might change a few commas and full stops between publication of the White Paper and the final passage of the Bill, the whole process will be null and void. That misses the point. The people of Scotland will not be swayed, when voting for or against a Scottish Parliament, merely because some power over railways or fisheries is or is not included. They will be voting on a gut feeling that they want a Scottish Parliament with control over its own affairs and its own money. Any minor changes made later by Parliament will in no way invalidate the decision of the people of Scotland.

It is no wonder that many Scottish Conservatives want out. They want to run their own show. I invite Conservatives who have spoken repeatedly and prominently in these debates to come to Scotland to campaign for the no side in the referendum. Then all of us would be able to stay at home, and would romp home.

Over 26 years, in four different councils, I have formed the view that in public life most of the people involved in the debate roughly understand the question, but they have different answers. The Conservative party has not begun to understand the question. It is on a different planet altogether. Many of us have used the well-known phrase about power corrupting. I have discovered in the past few days that the corruption of power is a lingering illness. The corruption carries on far longer than the power. The Conservatives must get their act together, because they are making a mockery of themselves, democracy and the House.

The Minister for Home Affairs and Devolution, Scottish Office (Mr. Henry McLeish): I am pleased to reply to the debate on the amendments. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) has it absolutely right.

It is my style to try to be as helpful as I can to the Conservative Opposition. They are recovering slowly from 1 May, but are obviously going through a period of recuperation.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): The Minister said that he agreed with the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie), and that he was absolutely right. Does that mean that the Minister accepts the hon. Gentleman's amendment?

Mr. McLeish: Obviously we are to have a continuation of the nit-picking exercise that was characteristic of the Opposition yesterday. If the right hon. Gentleman will just sit still for a few minutes more, I shall respond.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West is absolutely right that Conservative Members need to listen to what is happening in Scotland in relation to devolution and the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill. In my attempt to be continually helpful, I draw their attention to a poll in one of our national newspapers this morning. In fact there were two polls, but I shall deal first with the one on devolution. It appears that, in the most recent poll, the vote was 3:1 in support of a Scottish Parliament and 2:1 in support of it having tax-varying powers. Indeed, that poll is very encouraging.

I remind the Conservative Opposition of another poll in the same national newspaper this morning, which suggested that, after popular support for the Conservatives reached the dizzy heights of 18 per cent. on 1 May, it has now plummeted to 9 per cent. I submit that the fundamental challenge for Conservative Members to get to grips with is that voters in Scotland want, by 3:1, to support a Scottish Parliament, but have given only 9 per cent. support to what used to be Her Majesty's Government's party in Scotland.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McLeish: In a moment.

It is also important to identify who is saying what in the Conservative party about the referendum. In an excellent article in the *Evening News* today, pro-home rule Tory campaigner Christine Richards, ex-leader of the Tories on Edinburgh council, said:

"We cannot go on being arrogant and ignorant."

That is in relation to the "I still won't budge on devolution" concept put forward in the House.

I ask the Conservatives to think hard. It is becoming embarrassing for a Minister to try to help the Conservative party in Scotland to come to grips with its own reality.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): In addition to speaking to the lady to whom my hon. Friend referred, perhaps some Opposition Members should speak to the likes of Councillor Brian Meek, who is arguing a good case for an independent Conservative party in Scotland.

Mr. McLeish: My hon. Friend is obviously trying to be as helpful as I am in relation to the recuperation of the Conservative party, but I fear that if I do not get on to the amendments, you, Mr. Lord, will bring me back into line.

Mr. Grieve *rose—*

Mr. Fallon *rose—*

Mr. McLeish: I said that I would give way to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve).

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to the Minister, because, as I think he is aware, I have tried to attend these debates from the beginning precisely because I should like to be educated, especially on the views of Scottish and Welsh Members of Parliament. I confess that although I may go there frequently, I understand my own ignorance on many points.

There is no mention in anything that the Minister has said of the wider United Kingdom dimension. Can he not understand that one of the concerns that brings Conservative Members to address the House is the fact that unless the UK dimension is taken into account, simply going along because there may be wishes in Scotland or Wales will not produce a durable result that will both devolve government and preserve the Union?

Mr. McLeish: The hon. Gentleman's comment in relation to the franchise was dealt with yesterday.

However, there will be ample opportunity to debate the matter when the White Paper is published, during the campaign before the referendum and, if it is successful, during the passage of the substantive Bill. I am sure that that will provide the education that the hon. Gentleman seeks as well as giving Conservative Members the opportunity to participate and to make the views of their constituents known, whichever part of the United Kingdom they represent.

Mr. Dalyell: My hon. Friend said that there would be ample opportunity to debate the matter. In the public print there has been some reference to the White Paper being published on 25 July. Can my hon. Friend confirm that it will be before the middle of July?

Mr. McLeish: I can confirm that the Government want to publish the White Paper as soon as possible before the summer recess, and we have also confirmed that we want a debate on it when it is published.

Mr. Ancram *rose—*

Mr. McLeish: I want to make some progress.

Amendment Nos. 76 and 87 to 95 would have the effect of consulting the electorate in Scotland only on a single proposal for a Scottish Parliament with tax-varying powers. In effect, that would deny people in Scotland the opportunity to say whether they wanted their Parliament to have the power to vary tax.

We, of course, firmly believe that a Scottish Parliament should have the power to vary tax. The Westminster Parliament and local authorities have such powers. We believe that the responsibility and discipline that come with having the power to vary tax are important.

However, we believe that it is important that people in Scotland should be given the opportunity to express their views specifically on our tax-varying proposals. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) asked why we are consulting separately on our proposal for the Scottish Parliament to have tax-varying powers and not on any other aspects of our proposals—why taxation? Surely the hon. Gentleman will agree that taxation is significant. It is an issue on which most people have a view, and understandably so. It is only right that the views of the Scottish people on that issue are clear.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): When my hon. Friend refers to tax-raising powers, is he dealing with all kinds of taxes or just one kind of tax? Would VAT, corporation tax or capital gains tax be varied? Which tax is it?

Mr. McLeish: The tax-varying power applicable to Scotland will be predicated on income tax.

If hon. Members are so sure that the Scottish people want a Parliament with tax-varying powers, what harm can there be in asking them? We made it clear in our manifesto that we intended to consult them on that, and I can see no reason for failing to deliver on that pledge. Popular endorsement on that specific point will put the views of the people of Scotland beyond doubt and speed the passage of the subsequent legislation. I do not expect that the people of Scotland will want anything less for a Scottish Parliament.

Again, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan sought reassurance that a second referendum would not be held once the main devolution legislation had received Royal Assent. I am happy to assure him that we have no such intention.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Is it the Minister's position, as was reported, that if—I am sure that he and I would both expect and hope that it would not arise—there was a yes, no vote, a Labour Government would bring in legislation to introduce a Scottish Parliament without tax powers, despite his knowing that that is less than what he believes to be in the best interests of the Scottish people?

Mr. McLeish: In the spirit of optimism pervading the Government, we believe that we shall have a yes, yes vote. To talk of any other would, in some respects, help what I was going to describe as the no, no campaign, but it is difficult to envisage a no, no campaign other than the one being generated from Westminster by the Conservative party.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan also raised the point, as did the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), that there would be an opportunity to vote in favour of a Scottish Parliament and against it having tax-varying powers—the so-called yes, no vote. I have no doubt that we shall receive resounding support for our proposals for a Scottish Parliament with tax-varying powers. We fully expect a yes, yes result and we are planning on that basis.

The heart of a Parliament lies in its powers to legislate. Our proposals will ensure that legislation on Scottish affairs will be passed in Scotland by people elected in Scotland who understand and represent Scottish interests.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The point being made by me and by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) went slightly further. We were pointing out that a two-question referendum brings forward an option of a Parliament without tax-varying powers, which is not supported by any substantial party in the whole of Scotland. Why is that option being presented when other options, such as the independence option, are clearly not?

4.15 pm

Mr. McLeish: The hon. Gentleman will obviously have an opportunity a bit later in the debate to discuss the multi-option referendum. Suffice it to say that we believe that the two questions are vital. We believe that tax-varying powers are an essential element of our proposals for devolution and we shall campaign vigorously to ensure that we have a yes, yes vote.

The issue of a no, yes result was raised by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. I have already explained why we are committed to consulting the people of Scotland separately on the tax-varying powers of a Scottish Parliament. There will be two ballot papers, one on the establishment of a Scottish Parliament and one on whether it should have the power to vary tax. We are using two separate ballot papers after having consulted electoral practitioners who advised that their use would reduce the risk of spoilt ballot papers and would ease the

[Mr. McLeish]

process of the count. We do not expect a no, yes result in the referendum and we are certainly not planning for that. If an individual wants to vote in that way, he or she will be perfectly entitled to do so.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Who are these practitioners and what experience do they have of a two-ballot-paper referendum?

Mr. McLeish: Officials have consulted widely on these issues. Indeed, there is an association—this was news to me—that brings together people who are experts in the field. I can reassure my hon. Friend that a great deal of thought has gone into the matter.

Amendment Nos. 111 and 112 seek to amend the proposition on which the people in Scotland will be consulted—*[Interruption.]* It would be useful for Opposition Front-Bench Members to listen a bit, especially as the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), one of the leading contenders for the leadership, is here. It seems to be the practice of Conservatives to go to Scotland and to lecture, lecture and lecture the people there on devolution. Listening does not seem to have been one of their activities over the past 18 years.

Amendment Nos. 111 and 112 seek to amend the proposition on which the people in Scotland will be consulted, to refer to a Scottish Assembly and to remove the reference to tax-varying powers. We have already made it perfectly clear that we intend to consult the people in Scotland on our proposals for a Scottish Parliament and not on any other options.

A number of questions were asked about the specific powers of a Scottish Parliament and about details of our proposals—indeed, those questions have dominated most of the contributions from Conservative Members.

Mr. Ancram: I want to make a suggestion to the Minister of State which will, I hope, be helpful. Given the misunderstanding that has obviously arisen over the past three weeks over whether there will be a Bill before the referendum or a White Paper before the referendum, given that the Minister has told us that a White Paper will be produced before the House rises for the summer and that there will be a chance to debate it, and given that the referendum will not take place until September, will he consider producing a draft Bill before the referendum takes place, so that the people in Scotland and the people in Wales will know the detail of what they are being asked to vote on?

Mr. McLeish: I say with the greatest respect and courtesy that I can muster that Government Members are sick and tired of the fact that after 50 questions have been posed and 50 answers have been received, Front-Bench Conservative Members' contributions are just nit-picking over what is very, very obvious. I shall spell the matter out to the right hon. Gentleman. We have said that we shall publish a White Paper as soon as possible. We shall then seek to have the legislation passed through the House. We shall then move to a referendum in the autumn—

Mr. Ancram: Through both Houses?

Mr. McLeish: I meant that the legislation would pass through this House and, of course, the Lords. That would mean that the legislation would receive Royal Assent by the time we rose for the summer recess. That has been made obvious and clear at every possible opportunity. I suggest again a helpful piece of advice. Unless the Conservative Opposition's comments become more relevant to the points that have been made, they are frankly not only doing themselves a disservice, but ignoring the Conservative party in Scotland, which is seeking a constructive way forward.

Mr. Ancram: The Minister of State has said something and I want to be clear about it. Clarity is important. He said first that there would be a White Paper, then he said that legislation would go through the House. I looked surprised because I did not know whether he was referring to the Bill or legislation following the White Paper. We need to get the order clear. Which comes first?

Mr. McLeish: In a sense, I should not dignify the questions that have been asked. I shall spell it out. We are moving to the publication of a White Paper, which will be published before the House rises for the summer recess. *[Interruption.]* I wish that the right hon. Gentleman would sit and listen instead of talking and talking. He asked a question, and he should let me answer it. We shall be seeking to get Royal Assent for the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill before the House rises for the summer recess. We shall then proceed to a referendum in the autumn. A successful completion of the referendum will mean a substantial Bill being prepared later this year.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. McLeish: I am not giving way. A number of hon. Members want to speak. I have clarified the point, as my right hon. and hon. Friends have on numerous occasions.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): Dictatorship.

Mr. McLeish: Again, the Conservatives seem to learn absolutely nothing. They shout from sedentary positions, "Dictatorship, dictatorship, dictatorship."

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. McLeish: I am not giving way.

A number of questions were asked about the specific powers of a Scottish Parliament and particular details of the proposals. If hon. Members wish to engage in debate on the extent of a Scottish Parliament's powers, they should do so in the debate on the White Paper and during scrutiny of the main legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised a specific point on the Barnett formula. That is obviously an important issue and one that will be addressed in the White Paper.

Amendment No. 145 would provide for a referendum to be held in Scotland on the establishment and tax-raising rather than tax-varying powers of a Scottish Parliament. That assumes that a Scottish Parliament would never want to lower its taxation and suggests an ever-increasing spiral of taxation. It would be an absolute nonsense to tie the Parliament's hands in that way. A power to raise tax must be accompanied by a power to lower it. I invite hon. Members not to press their amendments.

Mr. Wallace: I listened with interest to the Minister's response. The debate has been useful and interesting

because it has not simply highlighted a number of questions on the referendum, but allowed comments on the whole question of taxation powers of a Scottish Parliament.

It is interesting to note that the Liberal Democrats' amendments have attracted a degree of all-party consensus, which hitherto has not been achieved in this Parliament. The hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) has indicated some support. The hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor)—for different reasons, perhaps—found merits in the amendments. Indeed, so has the Scottish National party. I am sure that, when the House divides in a few minutes, such a grand coalition will be welcome.

Some points have been raised about the powers that a Scottish Parliament would have. I wonder whether those taking part in the debate, especially Conservative Members who purport to speak with such knowledge, have read the report of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, "Scotland's Parliament: Scotland's Right", which was published on St. Andrew's day in 1995 and answers many of the questions raised. With more civil service input and jargon, it will no doubt be reflected in greater detail in the White Paper when it duly finds the light of day.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wallace: I shall give way in a moment.

The Government are not about to launch on the people of Scotland or the United Kingdom a complete bolt from the blue that that has not been previously trailed.

Mr. Ancram: How do we know?

Mr. Wallace: The right hon. Gentleman asks how we know. It was made perfectly clear in the election manifestos of both the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats that proposals for a Scottish Parliament would be firmly rooted in and based on the workings of the Scottish Constitutional Convention which, let it be remembered, was not a creature of either the Labour party or the Scottish Liberal Democrats. It reflected a very broad consensus in Scotland, including local authorities, Churches, trade unions, ethnic groups and Scottish language groups—perhaps the broadest-based civic representation in Scotland this century.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that, as a result of the convention, the logical consequence of a Scottish Parliament is the reduction in Scottish representation here at Westminster? That is something that the Government deny because it is not convenient for their party representation in the House. Their proposals amount to the gerrymandering of the British constitution in their favour. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his honesty.

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations, but what he said proves that he has not read the proposals of the Scottish Constitutional Convention. The convention specifically did not address the issue of the number of seats at Westminster, because that is a matter for Westminster and not for the Scottish Parliament. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the Liberal Democrats endorse what the Kilbrandon commission said in 1970 or 1971 about the reduction in the number of Scottish Members of Parliament. The Labour party does not agree with that position, but there we differ. The Scottish Constitutional Convention made no recommendation one way or the other.

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman said that the issue was a matter for Westminster. How can it be a matter only for Westminster unless we also sort out who at Westminster will decide it—the United Kingdom Members or the English Members?

Mr. Wallace: It is self-evident that the composition of the House must be a matter for the House and all its Members. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the wider UK dimension and asked how English Members would have a chance to take part in that wider dimension. That is self-evident, too, if he gives it one moment's thought. When the Bill for a Scottish Parliament or a Welsh Assembly comes before the House, hon. Members from all parts of the United Kingdom—Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland—will all have an opportunity to take part.

The Parliament of the United Kingdom is constituted—albeit that my party believes that it is constituted unfairly because of the electoral system, but that is the system that we operate—on the arguments that were put before the electorate and determined on 1 May. The overwhelming majority of the British people from Scotland, England and Wales voted on 1 May for parties that were committed to substantial constitutional reform, including Parliaments for Scotland and Wales within the United Kingdom. The representatives of the people will make the decisions and scrutinise the Bill when it comes before the House.

Mr. Garnier: The Bill mentions the Government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament, and the hon. Gentleman mentioned the Scottish Constitutional Convention paper. Would it not have been helpful for the public if a version or précis of the paper had been attached to the Bill as a schedule, so that in our debate on the referendum this week all those who do not have the hon. Gentleman's learning could understand what he was on about?

Mr. Wallace: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman. Not only has he clearly not read the Scottish Constitutional Convention proposals, but he has clearly not read the Bill. The fact that he is only now coming alive to the issue shows that he has not examined the proposals. If the referendum happens, the ballot paper to be put before the electorate will say:

"Parliament has decided to consult people in Scotland on the Government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament".

Those proposals, as has been made clear, will be published in a White Paper. That issue was raised earlier at Prime Minister's questions. I recall the Prime Minister saying that the Bill would be published and I realised at the time that he was making a mistake. I do not know why he did not own up to the mistake. At an early stage in his premiership, he has forgotten the basic rule—when one is in a hole, stop digging and start climbing. Nevertheless, all of us who have followed the debate knew that he meant that a White Paper would be the basis for the referendum.

[Mr. Wallace]

The Minister has not answered the question about what could happen if there was a yes, no vote. I accept that we should approach the issue in a spirit of optimism, to use the Minister's words. He has been assured that my party will campaign, if amendment No. 87 is not successful, for a yes, yes outcome. *The Herald* vote today was a 2:1 yes—but only 53 per cent. were in favour of the tax-varying powers. For me, that is not a sufficient cushion of comfort. It puts us on notice that we shall have to argue for those powers.

There is a good argument for those powers, but I believe that the Government are entering dangerous territory and taking a gamble. It would be better if the two questions were consolidated into one. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (Mr. Gorrie) and the hon. Member for Falkirk, West pointed out, there is no party in Scotland, and no body within the home rule movement in Scotland, that argues for the yes, no option that will appear on the ballot paper—a Scottish Parliament without tax-varying powers.

A Government who believe sincerely that the best solution for the government of Scotland is a Scottish Parliament with tax-varying powers are taking a gamble in allowing the possibility—let us put it no higher than that for the time being—of an outcome involving a Scottish Parliament without taxation powers, for which the Government will say they are prepared to legislate—

It being half-past Four o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *put the Question necessary to dispose of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 70, Noes 344.

Division No. 10] **[4.30 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard *(Sheffld Hallam)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Cotter, Brian
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Grieve, Dominic
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclennan, Robert
Mates, Michael
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'rs)*
Swinney, John
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steven
Welsh, Andrew
Wigley, Dafydd
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mr. Donald Gorrie.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Thomas
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Ms Clare
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas

Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Merron, Ms Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thompson, William
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. John McFall.

Question accordingly negatived.

4.45 pm

Mr. Salmond: I beg to move amendment No. 71, in page 1, line 6, leave out 'tax-varying powers' and insert 'constitutional status'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 97, in page 1, line 7, at end insert

'and on the status of Scotland within the United Kingdom'.

No. 204, in page 1, line 10, leave out '1' and insert

'(Referendum in Scotland (No. 3)).

No. 72, in schedule 1, page 4, line 5, at end insert 'and alternative'.

No. 73, in page 4, leave out line 7 and insert

'Note your preferred options in order of preference by marking 1, 2 or 3 by each option. You need not use every option.'.

No. 74, in page 4, line 8, after 'A', insert 'DEVOLVED'.

No. 75, in page 4, line 9, at end insert

'OR

I AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE AN INDEPENDENT SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT'.

No. 231, in page 4, line 9, at end insert

'AS PROPOSED BY THE GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER.'.

No. 232, in page 4, line 12, at end insert

'AS PROPOSED BY THE GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER'.

No. 76, in page 4, leave out lines 13 to 22.

No. 99, in page 4, line 22, at end add—'*Part III*—

Parliament has decided to consult people in Scotland on the status of Scotland within the United Kingdom.

Put a cross (X) in the appropriate box

I AGREE THAT SCOTLAND SHOULD REMAIN AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

I DO NOT AGREE THAT SCOTLAND SHOULD REMAIN AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE UNITED KINGDOM'.

New schedule 9—*Referendum in Scotland (No. 3)*—

Part I

FORM OF FIRST BALLOT PAPER

Parliament has decided to consult people in Scotland on the Government's proposals for a Scottish Parliament or independence for Scotland.

Put a cross (X) in the appropriate box:

I AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO CHANGE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SCOTLAND

or

I AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE A SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

or

I AGREE THAT SCOTLAND SHOULD LEAVE THE UNITED KINGDOM.'.

Amendment No. 77, in title, line 2, leave out 'tax-varying powers' and insert 'constitutional status'.

Mr. Salmond: The amendment should be considered with amendments Nos. 72 to 77. Their effect is to provide for a multi-option referendum in Scotland, to give people the choice between independence, devolution and the status quo on a preferential voting system to allow people to vote 1, 2, 3. The bottom option would be knocked out, resulting in a clear winner.

My contention is that this is the real referendum, if one is to be held at all. I must make it clear at the outset that if the Government had said that they had a mandate from the general election and therefore intended to proceed with their proposals for a devolved Scottish Parliament, they would have had no argument from me about a multi-option referendum. It is legitimate to say that the general election is a mandate to move ahead with devolution proposals. That, however, is not what the Government have done. Instead, they have taken the position, as was made clear by the Secretary of State two weeks ago, that the general election did not provide a test of the constitutional options. It was not a sufficient test because other issues prevailed during the campaign.

The issue on which the general election campaign in Scotland focused was the substantial urge to remove the Conservative party from every available seat, which the Scottish people were successful in doing in different ways in different constituencies. We all know that that was the key issue of the general election campaign in Scotland. If the Government believe that the general election did not decide the constitutional position and that therefore there must be a test of opinion, it is my position that that test of opinion must be fair and must make available to all the people the real options before the Scottish nation.

I want to discuss three arguments. First, members of all parties in the House have at one time or another supported the concept of a multi-option referendum. Secondly, I shall point to the various international precedents, and the one United Kingdom precedent, for my position. Thirdly, I shall argue that it is such a referendum that has genuine popular assent and is supported by the people of Scotland.

First, there is the argument that members of all parties have supported my position. It was certainly supported by the Secretary of State for Scotland on 23 April 1992, when he said not only that he supported the concept of a multi-option referendum but told the Scottish Trades Union Congress annual congress in Dundee that it should be "shouted from the rooftops".

The Secretary of State has been having some fun with his Tory opposite number—at least, I think that that is what the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) may become, although he is denying it; time will tell—about the various changes he has made in his position. The Secretary of State owes us an explanation of why the concept was to be "shouted from the rooftops" in 1992 but not even to be whispered in the Lobbies in 1997.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): We won.

Mr. Salmond: That is one of the hon. Gentleman's more telling contributions to debates of late. If he had been listening, he would realise that I argued that if the Secretary of State had wanted to take the Labour party's election victory as a mandate to proceed with a devolution plan without further consultation, I would have accepted that as a legitimate position. But that is not the position of the Labour party. Its position is that there has to be a test of opinion. The amendment proposes a democratic and real test of opinion.

Mr. Thomas Graham (West Renfrewshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give a guarantee that if there was a multi-option referendum in which people could vote for independence, but the people of Scotland rejected that, the Scottish National party would disband and join the other political parties?

Mr. Salmond: Like the Labour party did after the general elections in 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992? All democratic parties accept the result of a referendum or election. If they lose, they do not disband. They try to win another referendum in the future. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Of course. Democratic parties submit their position to the people and if they are defeated they try to find a better method of putting their arguments so that they can be successful in the future. What on earth is wrong with that? What is more interesting is why, in opposition, the Labour party supported the concept of putting independence on the ballot paper, yet in government finds that prospect too frightening.

Mr. Fallon: Is the hon. Gentleman now telling the Committee that if he is not satisfied with the result of the referendum or the legislation that follows it he will campaign immediately for a further referendum?

Mr. Salmond: No. The Scottish National party will campaign to win a general election, a referendum or an election to a Scottish Assembly at some point in the

future. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, having returned to the House, fully expects the Conservative party to return to power at the next general election. His may be a minority opinion, but I am sure that he holds it dear and clutches hope to his bosom.

A multi-option referendum was supported by the late John Smith. As leader of the Labour party, he made it clear that the Labour party as a whole was campaigning in support of the concept. So in the past there has been substantial Labour party support for the idea.

The organisation Scotland United was formed and predicated on the basis of a multi-option referendum, which it recognised as the one concept that in recent years had united the forces of constitutional change in Scotland. In its policy document, "What Price Democracy", published in 1992, it argued for a multi-option referendum, noting that

"one of the big problems with the 1979 referendum was the absence from the ballot paper of the independence option, which meant that a significant section of the Scottish population was denied the opportunity to vote for their preferred option."

Many members of that organisation are on the Government Benches today.

Not only is the concept supported by Labour Members but it was originally a Liberal party idea. In the late 1960s, Lord Steel introduced a Bill proposing a multi-option referendum. Liberal Members are fond of telling us that they have most of the good ideas and that other parties adopt them some time later. I see the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie) nodding her assent. What they tell us less often is that by the time they have convinced the rest of us that they are a good idea, they have deserted the cause and no longer espouse their original policies. I hope that, given the Liberal antecedents of the case, Liberal Members will support the amendment.

I have to accept that Tory support for our proposal is somewhat more recent. It was not evident when the Tories were in government, but at least one of the Tory leadership candidates, the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), announced in Scotland at the weekend that he was in favour of a multi-option referendum. To be fair, some Back-Bench Tory Members have argued over a longer period that independence should appear on the ballot paper in a constitutional referendum in Scotland.

Broad support for the concept has been expressed by hon. Members of all parties in the House. If we evaluate the amendment's chances of success, I comfort myself with the notion that the Secretary of State has held five positions on referendums on Scotland in the past five years. In 1992, when I debated with him as—

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Donald Dewar): Five?

Mr. Salmond: I am coming to all five.

In the 1992 general election, when we debated as the two party leaders in Scotland, the right hon. Gentleman was against any referendum. After the election, he moved, as I have already said, to support a multi-option referendum. Last year, when he was the Labour party Chief Whip, the proposal for a two-question referendum was first put forward and he adopted joint authorship of it. Some of us think that he was just covering fire for the right hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Robertson); none the less, he was willing to accept responsibility for that notion. When the Labour party's Scottish executive decided to have two referendums with three questions, that was described by the Labour party hierarchy as a mature and sensible decision. No doubt the right hon. Gentleman, as the then Chief Whip, also shared that opinion.

That takes us to the fifth change of heart—the two-question referendum proposed in the Bill. All I am saying is that, having taken five positions in the past five years, surely it is not too much to expect the right hon. Gentleman to move back to his 1992 position by accepting our amendment. I am sure that he will when he replies.

Mr. Dewar: Wait breathlessly.

Mr. Salmond: I shall do so. I am hoping for a sixth change of position because I know that, in his heart, the right hon. Gentleman knows that the amendment represents the right course to take.

There are a number of international examples of referendums that have been put before people in a range of countries where three or more clear constitutional positions have been offered. However, perhaps the example that is of most interest to the Committee is the decision of the Attlee Privy Council of the United Kingdom in 1946.

There was to be a ballot in Newfoundland on its democratic status. Originally, a constitutional convention suggested that only two options should be allowed, but the Attlee Privy Council decided otherwise. Preecing's Contemporary Archive for 6 to 13 November 1946 states:

"Her Majesty's Government have come to the conclusion that it would not be right that the people of Newfoundland should be deprived of an opportunity of considering the issue and they have therefore decided that confederation with Canada should be included as a third choice on the referendum paper."

The Attlee Privy Council—a Labour Government with a landslide majority—had the democratic common sense to see that it would be unfair to exclude from a referendum ballot paper an option that was supported by many people in Newfoundland. As we know, it was that option that eventually, albeit narrowly, carried the day in Newfoundland. That is why it entered the Canadian Confederation. That example is both international and pertaining to the United Kingdom.

I suggest that a multi-option referendum—a fair referendum—is the one that carries public support in Scotland. One opinion poll, which tested whether people wanted the option of independence to be included on the ballot paper of any referendum in Scotland, was published in *The Sunday Times* on 11 August 1996. It showed not only overwhelming support from the Scottish people—73 per cent.—for that idea, but majority support in every party for all the options of independence, devolution and the status quo to be included on the ballot paper. Of Labour supporters in Scotland, 81 per cent. suggested that that was the right thing to do. So there is public support for a fair ballot, but another factor should be recognised by the Committee and it is an argument that is not often put clearly.

According to my memory and experience, there has not been a single recent public opinion poll that presented the three options of independence, devolution or the status

[Mr. Salmond]

quo and showed a majority in favour of devolution. In the vast majority of polls, devolution has been the preferred option, but, as far as I am aware, not a single opinion poll citing those three options has shown 50 per cent. or more in favour of devolution. One opinion poll during the general election campaign suggested that independence and devolution were tied with 35 per cent. support, with support for the status quo at 24 per cent. The ICM poll in *The Scotsman* suggested that there was substantial support for the status quo—that was more than the other polls suggested.

5 pm

Mr. Dewar: I apologise for indulging my curiosity, but is the logic of the hon. Gentleman's position that any multi-choice referendum would be invalid unless one of the options received 50 per cent. support? Does it follow that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting a transferable vote multi-choice option?

Mr. Salmond: As I said in my introduction, and as the amendments state, people would mark 1, 2 or 3 in a preferential system. The option receiving the lowest number of votes in the first count would be knocked out and the votes redistributed, giving a winner with a substantial majority.

It is often said by Labour Members that devolution is supported by the overwhelming majority of the Scottish people. As today's opinion poll showed, that claim would be justified only if the independence option were not offered. As far as I know, of recent polls that have offered independence, devolution and the preservation of the status quo, not one has shown a majority in favour of devolution.

I think that *The Sunday Times* poll that I mentioned has the figures about right—it is a close thing between devolution and independence. The Conservative party would no doubt like to hang on to the ICM poll that showed substantial support—almost 30 per cent.—for the status quo. The truth is, we do not know what the result would be and the only way to find out is by putting the options fairly and squarely before the people of Scotland and allowing them to decide.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): We have discussed this before. Will the hon. Gentleman explain why he would not choose to have a referendum with three options in which people could answer yes or no? One option could be: "Do you wish Scotland to remain a part of the Union or the United Kingdom?" Is he afraid that because the question is so clear, people may choose to say yes?

Mr. Salmond: I do not think that anything could be clearer than the options that we propose in the amendments—whether people want no change to the constitutional arrangements, whether they want an independent Scottish Parliament or whether they want a devolved Scottish Parliament. Each option is given parity on the ballot paper and people are asked to judge. I would argue that that is a fair way to put the questions. But if the amendments are carried, if the Government want to address the issue of a multi-option referendum and if we want to reach agreement on a fair representation on the ballot paper, I am sure that that can be negotiated and arranged. The hon. Gentleman should look at what we have suggested and tell me why that is not a fair representation of the positions.

Mr. Connarty: Having taught modern studies in schools for a long time and having seen the problems faced by people at all levels—right up to those learning about government and political systems at A-level—in understanding a system where the votes are ranked between the first, second and third choices, with the consequential results of the single transferable vote, I think that the complexity involved is more likely to confuse than clarify.

Mr. Salmond: Australia and southern Ireland managed to cope with the complex system of voting. Most people would argue that over the years they have managed to produce reasonable results in terms of forming Governments. To argue against a system of preferential voting that is used in many countries and say that people in Scotland would be unable to cope shows me that when the hon. Gentleman was a modern studies teacher he should have had more faith in his pupils and that he should now have more faith in the people of Scotland.

Mr. Cash: Has the hon. Gentleman addressed the question of the threshold majority that should be required? Does he agree that in 1978 the number of people who voted amounted to only, I think, 32 per cent.? Does he agree that that showed such a low interest that some threshold is required in relation to the present arrangements?

Mr. Salmond: Not only have I addressed that issue, but I managed to devote a large part of my speech on the guillotine motion yesterday to that point. I told the hon. Gentleman's colleagues—he was not in the Chamber at the time—that I did not think it was a very powerful argument to advance when, on the basis of the total number of the electorate, the Conservative party received 12.5 per cent. of the votes at the election. On the basis of today's opinion poll, the Conservative party's percentage of the total electorate likely to vote in Scotland would be more like 6 per cent. The threshold argument is weak when advanced from the dizzy heights of 6 or 12.5 per cent. of the total electorate. The argument for a threshold—for a fancy franchise and a rigged ballot—is a poor one. It would be far better to allow, if I may use the Scottish parlance, a square go between the various constitutional options—far, far better to put them on the ballot paper in an honest and fair manner and let the people of Scotland decide. The people of Scotland should have the right to decide this matter.

I have shared the irritation of many hon. Members at the nature of some of the contributions to this debate from Conservative Members, especially the argument that the people of England are going have to pay for this constitutional exercise in Scotland. If those hon. Members had been involved in the general election campaign in Scotland, perhaps they would have been surprised that one of the matters on which all the parties were agreed was the figures showing a substantial fiscal surplus in Scotland between 1979 and 1995. Those figures were first revealed

in a Treasury answer on 13 January this year and all the political parties confirmed them, including the then Secretary of State for Scotland at a press conference.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Rubbish—absolute rubbish.

Mr. Salmond: I hear his former parliamentary private secretary telling me that that is absolute rubbish. On 8 April 1997, *The Herald* ran the headline:

"Forsyth accepts that calculations show a net cash flow of £27,000 million to England."

Given that, earlier today, Conservative Members suggested to the Prime Minister that if he was misquoted he should have corrected the record, perhaps the then Secretary of State for Scotland should have corrected the record if he felt that he was misquoted during the election campaign. My point is that it is deeply insulting to people in Scotland to conduct the argument on that basis.

Mr. Jenkin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: No, I am not giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Jenkin: He does not dare.

Mr. Salmond: If the hon. Gentleman checks the record, he will find that I am more than generous in giving way to a range of hon. Members. I am not giving way because I want to refer to the nature and quality of the arguments.

It is demeaning to argue for a threshold, for a fancy franchise, for a 40 per cent. rule or for a 50 per cent. rule—that is an assault on the democratic process. It is also demeaning and inaccurate of Conservative Members to show their contempt for Scotland and for Wales by the way in which they have addressed some of those arguments over the past 24 hours.

All of us have a responsibility to find a method of reaching agreement and of holding a referendum. If we are to consult the people, if we are to offer them a fair chance to express their view and if it is a referendum that is required and not a general election, as has been argued, then surely the case for putting all the options clearly, fairly and squarely before the people on a ballot is unanswerable. Whatever the voting configurations are in the Lobbies later this evening, I know that, in their hearts, most hon. Members know that that is the right thing to do.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): I shall be brief, because I have personal reservations about referendums in general.

As many hon. Members will know, the referendum device was introduced into our constitution at the end of the 19th century by a man called A. V. Dicey, who openly admitted that he did so with the purpose of blocking home rule for Ireland. In parliamentary terms, he was successful because he did block home rule for Ireland at that time, but that success had grave consequences for the people of that island and for the people of this island with which we have been living ever since. Referendums in general are a conservative measure and are usually introduced by those who want to preserve the constitutional status quo and prevent change of any sort from being introduced by radical reformers.

Indeed, promoters of referendums since Mr. Dicey have followed his example. Hon. Members will recall that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) claims credit for having secured the 1975 referendum, but he did not do it because he wanted Britain to go into the Common Market; rather he did it for the opposite purpose. Again, in 1979 the referendum on Scottish devolution was promoted by those who wanted to stop devolution—it was the last throw of the dice for those who wanted to stop a Scottish Parliament being set up. By use of the threshold argument, to which Conservative Members have referred, they were successful in stopping devolution at that time and Scotland has paid the price ever since.

In general, therefore, I am not a natural supporter of referendums and I do not see the need to hold them, except in certain circumstances where they can be justified. I believe that referendums would have been justified in the circumstances that obtained in Scotland in the aftermath of the 1992 general election, when Scotland clearly voted for parties that had proposed a Scottish Parliament. Three out of four voters in Scotland voted for parties that were offering a Scottish Parliament, but all the voters got was five more years of the Tories, who refused to change the status quo.

In those circumstances, it was important to unite the forces for change in Scotland around the one issue that could unite them—the holding of a multi-option referendum, to give the Scottish people the chance to say whether they wanted independence, devolution or the status quo. That campaign was unsuccessful. I am as sorry as anyone else that it was, but the fact that people supported it at that time is not necessarily a reason to expect them to support the holding of a referendum at this point in our history, because there are inherent weaknesses in the multi-option referendum. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) did not discuss the main weakness.

It is argued that the majority of people in Scotland support devolution, but that is not necessarily the case. The 9 per cent. of the electorate in Scotland who support the Tories are not the only ones who support the status quo. Some members of the Labour party support the status quo. Some supporters of the Labour party support the status quo.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Name them.

Mr. McAllion: I would be here all night. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] It is a joke. *[Laughter.]* The likelihood is that there would be a three-way split in any such vote. We do not know what the terms of that split would be—perhaps 40 per cent. for devolution, 30 per cent. for independence and 25 per cent. for the status quo. The idea that we should settle the issue by second choices does not encourage me much.

If I had to vote in a multi-option referendum, I would put devolution first and independence second, but I would not want independence to be established in Scotland on the basis of my second choice or those of other people. People should positively vote for independence; and if independence is established, it should be established on the basis of a majority, not of second choices. Anything else is a weak position.

I have great sympathy with the idea that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan expressed—that we have a mandate to establish a Scottish Parliament and we

[Mr. McAllion]

should get on with doing it. In fact, if I, not my right hon. Friend, were Secretary of State for Scotland, that is what we would be doing.

Mr. Salmond: If the hon. Member cares to look at the results of *The Herald* poll on the second question published this morning, he will see that the proposed second question in the referendum can be carried with a majority only on the second choices of people who want independence for Scotland. Why is it all right to carry devolution on the second choices of those who want independence, but not to carry independence on the second choices of those who want devolution?

Mr. McAllion: The Government were given a mandate. The manifesto that the Labour party submitted to the Scottish people at the last general election said that, if elected, Labour would introduce a two-question referendum. The Government are honouring that mandate, and it is a bit much to say that we are being dishonourable by implementing the proposals that we submitted to the Scottish people in a general election, for which they then voted. It is a very honourable position for the Government to take.

I accept that a yes, yes vote will depend on the support of Scottish National party supporters. I hope that they will understand that if they vote yes, yes we shall get, for the first time in nearly 300 years, a Parliament in Scotland, and that can be only to their advantage. I make no pretence that it will be otherwise. It will be to the advantage of the SNP to have a Parliament in Scotland because, obviously, they will receive far better representation in that Government, under a proportional system, than they possibly could in this Parliament under a first-past-the-post system, and I entirely welcome that.

It would be open to a Scottish Parliament to decide to hold a referendum on whatever subject it wished. I accept that and I have no problem with it. However, at this stage in the fight for a Scottish Parliament, it is important to maximise the yes, yes vote. I am sure that the SNP will help.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham (Perth): I am interested in what the hon. Member has to say, and we are all heartened when a Government honour their manifesto pledges, but is he seriously suggesting that the people of Scotland would rise up and object if the current Government decided to go even further than their manifesto pledge and offer that third option? Does he think that, having been promised 250,000 jobs, people will object if, by chance, 255,000 jobs are created? That is effectively what he is saying. Is he really arguing that people will object if the Government exceed their manifesto commitment?

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Lady is asking me to agree that the Labour Government should implement the SNP manifesto now that the Labour Government have been elected. Of course that makes no sense.

In fact, the SNP manifesto does not propose a multi-option referendum. During the general election, Charter 88 called a democracy day debate, in which all the candidates had to answer questions on democracy. The question came up about Labour's proposals for a two-question referendum, and the SNP candidate who stood against me gave an assurance from the platform during the election that, if elected, the SNP would hold a multi-option referendum and stand by the result.

I took that to be SNP policy until today, when I examined the SNP general election manifesto. It shows a picture of Fergus Ewing—described as the "Cabinet Chief Secretary". [HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] I do not know where he is, but the manifesto said what would happen if the SNP had won the last general election in Scotland:

"After the election of a majority of SNP MPs, the SNP will immediately initiate negotiations for independence with the UK Government"—

and with the European Parliament.

"At the conclusion of this period (which is likely to take between six and twelve months) the people of Scotland will be asked to approve the 'independence settlement' in a simple one question referendum."

5.15 pm

So the commitment in the SNP manifesto was

"a simple one question referendum",

and SNP Members should not say tonight that a two-question referendum is unfair and undemocratic when they have just fought a general election on the platform of a one-question referendum.

Mr. Salmond: There is an exact parallel—that of a Labour Government receiving a mandate to pass devolution legislation and putting that, after parliamentary agreement, to the people in a post-legislative referendum. However, the Labour Government have not done that. They have said that the general election did not decide these issues, and Ministers argue that the people must be consulted. If the people are to be consulted, why not on independence?

Mr. McAllion: The hon. Gentleman argued earlier that if the Labour Government had simply set up a Scottish Parliament, he would have accepted that. He also said that if there is any test of opinion, it must be a fair test of opinion and it must be a multi-option referendum, yet he intended to test the opinion of the Scottish people in a one-question referendum if the SNP had won the last general election. It is very unfair of the hon. Gentleman to accuse my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of changing his position on the referendum issue when the SNP has changed its in the space of a month, since the general election.

Mr. Graham: Is my hon. Friend aware that nearly every member of the Labour party in Scotland supported devolution but did not support separatism? We told the people of Scotland that we wanted a Scottish Parliament along the lines of the Scottish Constitutional Convention. We did not hoodwink or kid the folk that we would lead them down the road of separatism. Why should we listen when the SNP tell us to follow its separatism policies, which we did not fight the general election on?

Mr. McAllion: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is about a general election mandate, and part of the Labour Government's mandate was that they should go ahead with the two-question referendum. It was in the

manifesto and was spoken about at all the public meetings in all the constituencies in Scotland by all the candidates. In fact, they were fiercely attacked by the SNP and by others for adopting such a position.

In the event, the voters voted for us, and it should not be regarded as dishonourable or objectionable for the Labour Government to honour their manifesto commitment to introduce a referendum with two questions.

I realised the dangers of the second question more than anything during the brief period that I spent on the Labour Front Bench. I believe that it is a very weak position to put the second question to the people in a referendum. If this Parliament were to hold a referendum throughout the United Kingdom seeking the right to vary taxation throughout the UK, I doubt that a majority of UK taxpayers would give Parliament the power to vary taxation in the way in which the Tories did in the last Parliament. We must overcome that difficulty. We have a fight on our hands to win two yes votes in the referendum in September.

I do not mean this insultingly, but the Tory party in Parliament is irrelevant to the contest in September. We need to unite behind a Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers, and then the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and the SNP will be even better placed to argue the case than they are at the moment.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): It is a great honour for me to address the House for the first time, as the first elected Member for Vale of York. I hope that hon. Members will consider this a good opportunity for me to pay tribute to my predecessors, one of whom is the shadow Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). Another is the shadow Minister for local government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), the third is my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) and the fourth is the former Member for Harrogate, Mr. Robert Banks. I hope that colleagues will not feel that I am insisting that it takes one woman to do the work of four men. My predecessors have paved the way for me to take over in a smooth transition as the first Member for Vale of York.

In addition to his work as the former Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks did great work in north Yorkshire, especially among the farming community, as did my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon in his previous capacity at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Hon. Members will recall that the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale has largely been in connection with racecourses throughout Great Britain, including Scotland and Wales, and not least in my own constituency of Thirsk. Sadly, the former hon. Member for Harrogate retired at the last election. He will be remembered for the sterling work that he did for his constituency, and for the work that he did as a man of great integrity in our relations with Sudan.

I am a Scot by birth and a Scottish advocate by profession, albeit non-practising at present. I am proud to have had the benefit of a Yorkshire education. It may not be that of, say, Fettes college, but I am proud to have been educated at Harrogate college in north Yorkshire and subsequently at the university of Edinburgh. I am exceedingly attached to my Scottish roots, which I consider to be firmly established in the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

I shall say a few words about my constituency. The Vale of York is a special place with special people in it. I have referred to four of our number. My predecessors also include the present European Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan. Other well-known residents of my home town, Thirsk, were Thomas Lord who, as hon. Members will recall, was the founding member of Lord's cricket ground, and Alf Wight—another Scot—perhaps better known for his contribution to animals as James Herriot. All those honourable people have made special contributions to the life of the Vale of York, as I hope to do in my capacity as the first elected Member. The geographic heart of my constituency is Helperby, but the population is based on the very pretty market towns of Bedale, Boroughbridge, Thirsk and Easingwold, as well as north York.

I turn to the business in question. On amendment No. 71, I have great difficulty in understanding the need for such an amendment and in supporting it. I query the relevance of drawing on the experience of Newfoundland and Australia, unless the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) is suggesting that the Scots who live there made a contribution there from which those of us now living in England can learn.

I have a letter from a constituent who is extremely concerned that those of us Scots who are now resident in England will not have a vote in the referendum. He writes:

"I and tens of thousands of expatriate Scots, if not more, will not be enfranchised, nor would the expatriate Welsh."

I hope that hon. Members will consider that no less relevant than the amendment.

I have great difficulty in sharing the philosophy of the Government and other Opposition Members with whom I share a Bench. They conclude from the result of the general election that we have a mandate from the Scottish people and the Welsh people—albeit those who happen to live within the borders of Scotland and Wales—on the question of a referendum. In my humble experience in my first parliamentary term, we fight general elections not on constitutional issues, of which the Bill forms a part, but on domestic issues such as education—for example, assisted places such as those that were enjoyed by hon. Members at Fettes college—health and law and order.

I shall look forward with great anticipation to the referendum campaign, to see whether there is a sufficient majority of the Scottish and Welsh people in favour of the referendum, before we proceed further.

On clause 1, I am treading on new ground as a new Member, but I have serious reservations about substantive procedural points in the Bill being dealt with by Order in Council. Perhaps the Government could put me out of my misery by enlightening me.

One of the reasons why I sought to be the first Member of Parliament for Vale of York was that I believe that there should be proper scrutiny in the House through primary legislation. As secondary legislation, an Order in Council is not an appropriate instrument for the consideration of issues of a constitutional nature. They should be dealt with on the Floor of the House, not in Committee, in the form of a primary Bill enabling us to scrutinise draft legislation.

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

We can draw parallels with the European legislation that appears before the House as secondary legislation. I seek an explanation as to why the Government consider it appropriate to proceed by way of Order in Council, which I do not consider to be an appropriate instrument to use on this occasion. I believe that it infringes the heart of parliamentary sovereignty, which the Opposition hold dear.

Returning to the Vale of York, I invite the Government to consider one point. Perhaps we could have a future referendum on how Scottish Power will transfer electricity. The Government will have to reach a view on whether a new line of pylons should be built in the Vale of York. It would be more appropriate to use any so-called windfall tax to put electricity wires underground, rather than carrying them in pylon form. Would the Government consider a referendum on the matter?

Finally, if the outcome of a referendum in Scotland was clearly in favour of devolution, would the post of Secretary of State for Scotland disappear? Who in Parliament would take subsequent decisions?

Mr. Dalyell: It has been the tradition in the House to welcome maiden speeches, but I do so now out of more than perfunctory politeness. I do not think that I have ever met the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), but I warmly congratulate her on using her maiden speech to make pertinent observations on the topic in hand.

When I came into the House, it was the tradition that every maiden speech was devoted to the subject being discussed on the Floor of the House. That, alas, has rather ceased to be the tradition. It is an old tradition to which the hon. Lady returned with something pertinent and worthwhile to say. It is not for me to judge the content of her contribution to the debate, but she should be applauded by all of us for having thought about the subject under discussion and for making a highly relevant contribution. Maiden speeches are not always welcome on guillotine motions, but no one can accuse her of not treating the guillotine properly or of abusing the time of the House. She also has a locus in this matter, in that she is a graduate of the university of Edinburgh. I am sure I speak for the whole House when I say that we look forward to hearing her speak on many future occasions.

I am tempted to break the habit of a lifetime and to vote for an SNP amendment, because it has the benefit of seeming transparency. Some of us believe that once an Assembly or Parliament is established, we shall be on a motorway with no exit to something that is indistinguishable either from federalism or from an independent Scottish state. For us, then, transparency has many attractions. It will however perhaps come as a relief to the leader of the SNP, my constituent, to discover that I will not be voting with his party this evening. I strongly believe that referendums should be about only concrete, definite proposals. It is wrong to have a general referendum on independence without knowing the exact terms of that independence. Independence involves divorce, and divorces can be messy. We are entitled to know the terms of the divorce settlement in the case of England and Scotland before we have a referendum on independence.

5.30 pm

Mr. Salmond: The hon. Gentleman and I have discussed this on a number of occasions. It is why, under my party's proposals, the referendum would be held after a negotiated settlement once the exact terms of the proposals were available. The hon. Gentleman will understand that our amendment today cannot follow that line because it deals with a referendum that the Government want to hold in September. So the fault of holding the referendum before the legislation is the Government's, not mine.

Mr. Dalyell: It would be silly of me to say that I did not understand what the hon. Gentleman is saying, given what I have said before. I just thought I would explain why I will not be in the Lobby with him, greatly tempted though I was.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I begin by echoing the words of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on her excellent maiden speech. I hope that she will forgive me if I do not say more than that, much as I would like to expand on my compliments. The time left for this debate goes to show the absurdity of the straitjacket in which the Government have placed us. We have to vote at 6 o'clock on the most important single issue to be debated on this Bill. Many of the Back Benchers who would have liked to take part will not have had the chance to do so by then.

Time is so limited that we are having to vote only on an amendment which is rather confusing and which would produce a confused result. I shall confine my brief remarks to amendments Nos. 97 and 99, the latter being the substantive one. It details a third question to put before the people of Scotland, taking up the wording that the Government have deployed for the other two questions:

"I AGREE THAT SCOTLAND SHOULD REMAIN AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

I DO NOT AGREE THAT SCOTLAND SHOULD REMAIN AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE UNITED KINGDOM".

The great virtue of the amendment and the question is that there is nothing incompatible about a voter saying that he or she wants a Scottish Parliament and that he or she wants to affirm the unity of the United Kingdom. I have always made the preservation of the United Kingdom my greatest aim. That is why I took an active part in the devolution debates of the 1970s. I would argue from a rather different position this evening if Parliament were finely balanced and if it were likely that the Government could be defeated. But I accept that the Government's majority will not be overturned; I also accept that we are in a weak position following the general election, there being no Scottish Conservative Members. I therefore want to test the Government's resolve.

The Secretary of State has often proclaimed his personal belief in the integrity of the United Kingdom. I must therefore ask him how the amendment can fail to strengthen his cause and the cause of others who believe in the United Kingdom. It merely gives those who go to the polls in September the opportunity to put a cross in a third box. Some people may say that they want a Parliament but not with tax-raising powers. They may also want to remain part of the United Kingdom. If 78 or 80 per cent. want to remain a part of it, as the recent general election seemed to show, such a vote would represent a massive positive affirmation.

If, on the other hand, people voted in favour of Scotland not remaining part of the United Kingdom, I would deplore and regret that—but at least we would know where we were going. It is after all important to know that. That is why, on this one specific issue, I have always made common cause with the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and his colleagues, who wish to test support for independence. That is precisely what the amendment would do.

I shall want to campaign vigorously on the issue. Indeed, any Member of the UK Parliament has the right to campaign in Scotland on the referendum and to support the idea of Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom. If we are successful, perhaps many of the dangers that we have forecast will be lessened—but setting up a Scottish Parliament on the basis of the referendum questions proposed in the Bill would leave the whole issue wide open. Many of those who vote for a Scottish Parliament in a two-question referendum will be those who support the SNP line, but there will be no way, as things stand, of knowing whether they support that line or the Government line.

As the Secretary of State knows, I accept that there will be a Scottish Parliament—but I want it to succeed and not to lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. I therefore beg the Secretary of State even at this late stage to accept the logic of what I am saying and to introduce an amendment similar to mine in another place. We will not have the chance to vote on this question here tonight, a fact which I regret, but it is certainly right that the other place should examine the Bill in minute detail. It should not filibuster or hold up the Bill—it will not do so—and I hope that no accusations will be levelled at their lordships if they do examine the Bill in detail.

I am not one to suggest that the Salisbury convention should be flouted or overturned; I do not think that it would be if, in another place, an amendment along these lines were accepted. The Commons would then have the opportunity to agree or disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.

I ask the Secretary of State to take the initiative and to table an amendment along these lines in another place. That will give him the satisfaction of knowing that his devotion to the United Kingdom can be supported by a large majority of those who go to the polls in September.

Mr. Dewar: I welcome the speech made by the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh). It is always a pleasure to see another part of the Scottish diaspora appearing in the House. I do not know the hon. Lady personally, but I do know that she is the Member of the European Parliament for the constituency of Essex North and Suffolk South. It seems that her appetite for politics is insatiable. She certainly has a remarkable geographical range, and I congratulate her on her ambition. She made a good speech—there is no doubt about that. It was not made in a particularly distinctive Scottish accent, but that was possibly the impact of Harrogate in earlier and better years.

The hon. Lady showed a very lively style and made many pertinent points, but I will take some slight revenge on her, because she made the mistake of asking a fairly technical question about Orders in Council. I can assure her that they will have to be considered by the affirmative resolution procedure in both Houses, and she will have every opportunity to take part in that debate.

I must also tell the hon. Lady—here I visibly preen myself on behalf of the Government—that we have, of course, produced the Orders in Council in draft form, and they are in the Library now. Perhaps she will want to rush down there in just a few minutes to prepare her various recommendations and pleas about possible alterations, but I am sure that she will not—she is far too sensible. The Orders in Council are important, even though they might be described as crossing the t's and dotting the i's, as they deal with the small change to the mechanics of the referendum process.

The hon. Lady is extremely welcome in the House. I suspect that I shall hear her on many occasions, particularly if she is pressed into service as a kind of bearer or bag carrier for whoever is unfortunate enough to be shadow Secretary of State for Scotland. She is obviously well qualified by her Scottish antecedents.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): My right hon. Friend mentioned the referendum process. As this will be the last opportunity to raise the issue on this clause, and possibly on clause 2, will he confirm that the results of the local counts will be publicly announced in Wales and Scotland as they were in 1979?

Mr. Dewar: My understanding is that the global result will be announced publicly, and that is the one that counts, as it is the ultimate decision-making total. We hope to be able to announce the Scottish count—I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot speak about the detail for Wales—on the night, which is a change from what happened in 1979.

Mr. Rowlands: What about locally?

Mr. Dewar: We also expect the local government area counts to become available. That is right. I hope that that is of some help.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute) *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I recognise that the hon. Lady will want to talk to me about the problems of Argyll and Bute. We shall consult her constituents. Perhaps the modern miracle of a helicopter will have to be brought into play in order to achieve this, but it will not amount to "Apocalypse Now".

Mrs. Michie: It is a big problem. We shall not be able to afford to have helicopters flying at night unless the Secretary of State comes up with the funding.

Mr. Dewar: I did say that it is an ambition. I am very well aware of the dangers of making of-the-cuff gifts, even to someone as charming as the hon. Lady—and that really was sucking up rather horribly. It is an ambition, but it depends on the practicalities. The House would see it as an advantage if it were possible to get the results as early as possible.

Mr. Garnier: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Dewar: No, I must press on, and I have some respect for hon. Members who may want to get in. The hon. and learned Gentleman is a persistent recidivist on questions of this matter.

5.45 pm

I have some things in common with the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). I sometimes find it a little puzzling to recognise that he is a reasonable man, but I do so quite often. I believe very firmly that we should retain our connections with the rest of the United Kingdom—I speak here from a Scottish point of view—but I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's suggestion is a helpful way to achieve that.

The hon. Gentleman invites us to put another question on the ballot paper about Scotland remaining an integral part of the United Kingdom. The word "integral" is open to many interpretations and might lead to some confusion. Anyway, it seems to me that his view is based to some extent on a misunderstanding: that in some way the devolution settlement would remove Scotland from being an integral part. I recognise what the hon. Gentleman says, but inevitably the question would be seen as an alternative and not a buttressing question. It confuses the situation and it is not one that I would be prepared to endorse.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman understands that my position—his may be different—is that if we have the good health of the United Kingdom in mind, we have to establish that the framework of government is responsive enough to adapt to changing conditions, and to give more direct access to government, not just in Scotland but in other parts of the United Kingdom. We do not see this as an isolated move on the part of the Government. Rather it is an important part of a package.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: No, I am sorry, but I shall not give way. I recognise that it looks rude, and I hope that hon. Members will recognise that I am not given to refusing information, but I must push on.

This group of amendments would have the effect of providing a multi-option referendum of the kind described by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). This is a serious issue, and I do not underestimate the importance of the debate. The hon. Gentleman made his case in his usual compact style very fairly. I particularly appreciate his recognition that the preferred option, from the vast majority of tests of public opinion, has been a devolution option rather than an independence option. I hasten to say that I do not believe that that means that he cannot continue to ply his trade and push his wares, although I have a rather less optimistic view than he has of his likely success.

My essential objection to a multi-option referendum is that it is using the referendum as a way to canvass a range of options. It is a snap poll. It is, in a sense—if one is being a little pejorative, although I do not mean to be—a beauty contest. That is not the stage that we are at, and I do not think that that should be the aim of the referendum. I will give an example, which I hope that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan will find persuasive. It is one that he gave me, but I did not recognise it until I heard the exchange between him and my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion).

Although the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan is in favour of a multi-option referendum as a general principle, when it comes—if it ever does—to the point where he wishes to implement a specific constitutional scheme, he should put that to the people of Scotland in a single-question referendum to get it endorsed. My view is that we are at that stage now. We are trying to establish consent to a specific scheme and not merely to canvass competing options. If that scheme is rejected in the referendum—

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside) *rose—*

Mr. Dewar: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment—I will make one exception—as I am attacking his party. *[Interruption.]* Well, disputing with his party, perfectly fairly.

If we had a rejection in that referendum, obviously we might well be back to the canvassing of options, many of us in a somewhat puzzled and disappointed state. At this stage we have a plan. We have been challenged to establish consent and we are in the business of establishing consent. It seems to me, therefore, that the single-question option is indeed the right one.

Mr. Swinney: The kernel of this point seems to be the publication of the White Paper so that we know in specific detail the contents of the Government's proposal. That is why the multi-option referendum is relevant now, and why a post-legislative referendum—post-independence—would be relevant at that stage. The kernel is the publication of the White Paper, and that is not evident from the debate today.

Mr. Dewar: There were some spirited exchanges on that subject earlier today and I seem to have been talking about it for some time—some might say interminably. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that a referendum without a White Paper setting out the scheme would be a very odd exercise indeed. We have already made it clear that we intend to publish the White Paper before the House gets up for the summer recess. I hope that that would give plenty of opportunity for people to study it. The hon. Gentleman is well aware of the essential differences between his position and mine—as, I believe, is Scotland at the end of the day.

There is a misconception about the stage that we are at and what we are trying to achieve. It is the distinction, the endorsement of a specific proposal, that conditions and dictates the subject matter of the referendum. I recognise that that is a matter about which we will disagree, but it seems to be a sensible approach. With all respect to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, I was not desperately impressed by some of his arguments, although he put them neatly, as I said. I well remember 28 April 1992: it was probably from the top of an open-top bus in George square in the driving rain, I suspect—at any event, I remember that period, but it was in the very different context of a Government who had been badly defeated in Scotland, who were clearly not listening to the opinion of the Scottish people and who, collectively, were as deaf as a post. In those circumstances, we thought that a test of public opinion of a more general sort had some merit, although we could not persuade the then Government of that. We are now in the very different circumstances that I have outlined, so my position is consistent and justified.

I do not intend to follow the hon. Gentleman into international comparisons, although I am always intrigued by the hard work put in by the Scottish National party, looking at the most obscure—*[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Gentleman accepted that.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: Australia.

Mr. Dewar: I know that the hon. Lady comes from Australia. She is so proud of her Australian roots that it is almost a pity that she left them. However, that is not a point that I would push because she entertains us greatly now that she is here. However, I was merely referring to Newfoundland. I remember two interesting passages in Greenland's constitution being illuminated recently by the hon. Gentleman. I should plead guilty because I can remember boring the House on one occasion with some interesting information about poll tax referendums in various obscure parts of Canada. We all do it on occasion, but it is not relevant.

I have made the main points that I want to make about the context and the aim, and in the interests of the House I shall leave the matter there.

The referendum is directly linked to delivery. I spent 20 years of my political life—perhaps more than that—arguing the pros and cons, the difficulties, advantages and opportunities of the matter. We have now got to the point where we can make progress. However, we need to settle the issue of content. The referendum is a good way to do that.

I never quarrel with my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East, but can I say to him gently that we are cracking on at some speed with these matters. He may just have caught a note of dissent from the Conservative Benches on the timetable that we have adopted and the speed at which we are moving. That is because we are determined to maintain momentum and progress. It is very much a matter of action this day.

If the Bill completes its progress successfully today and goes on to another place and, I hope, safely to the statute book, we will allow the people of Scotland to have their say and to endorse or not endorse—I cannot be blindly confident about the outcome. Clearly, the opinion polls in today's press are immensely encouraging. I agree that we have to work, but above all we must trust the people to reach the decision that they want. I very much hope that they will give us the momentum and moral authority to bring forward and complete one of the most exciting reforms in British constitutional history this century.

Mr. Ancram: I understand the urgency with which the Secretary of State will bring forward the White Paper. It might be helpful if he were to consider attaching a draft Bill to it so that we could see all the details. I understand that that is something that the Government are considering doing in relation to certain White Papers and it might be useful on this occasion.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on an excellent maiden speech. I am delighted that even if the Conservative party has no Scottish Members of Parliament we now have as many Scottish advocates as the Labour party and more than any other party. It was an excellent speech and we look forward to hearing many more from her.

The Conservative party is in a difficult position because we agree with the principle that there should be a multi-option question, where three relevant questions should be posed. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said, however, we have an amendment which goes much further than that and suggests that an order of preference should be built into that multi-option question. I do not often find myself agreeing with the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion), but I do agree that to decide such constitutional matters on second or third preference is fairly dangerous.

We support the principle because at present the Bill contains two questions—whether there should be a Scottish Parliament or not. Those who vote for a Scottish Parliament could do so for two very different reasons. The Government will campaign and vote for it because, as they have often said, they believe that it will buttress the Union. Nationalists in Scotland have made it clear that they will vote for it because they think that it will lead to the break-up of the United Kingdom. There are thus two completely different and opposite reasons for voting for the same option. That is a dangerous basis on which to say that there is a mandate to take this matter forward and then to take legislation forward.

I clearly remember that after the last referendum we had arguments which lasted for a long time, which were rehearsed yesterday in the House, about non-voters and whether they should be taken as yes voters or no voters and what that meant in terms of the outcome. The idea that there could be a yes vote for a Scottish Parliament which could be based on the views of those who wish to maintain a United Kingdom and those who wish to break it up is a dangerous precedent.

It is for that reason that I say that we would have supported the amendments tabled in the names of my hon. Friends the Members for South Staffordshire and for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). Both had amendments which clearly would have enabled the Scottish people to decide between three options—independence, a devolved Parliament in Scotland, or the status quo. Those are the real questions that should be asked, but as they are not available to us in the amendment on which we are about to vote, the Opposition spokesmen will abstain.

Mr. Salmond: We have had an interesting debate, constrained by the time available, but none the less a number of important points have been made. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on her maiden speech. She said that we must not think that she would replace all four of her predecessors. Having known her four predecessors and having listened to her excellent maiden speech, I am sure that she has a good chance of effectively replacing all four of her predecessors and we look forward to more contributions from her.

I was interested to hear the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) announce to the House that in principle Conservatives are in favour of the amendments and a multi-option referendum. That comes as a surprise to some of us. We have been waiting for the past 18 years to see some sign of that. None the less, we must accept that this is something of a breakthrough. It is the first indication during the past four weeks that Conservative Front-Bench Members have listened to the Scottish

[Mr. Salmond]

electorate's verdict. We now have it on the record that, in principle, the Conservative party is in favour of a multi-option referendum.

It is rather weak to say that things should have been done differently. Preferential voting is widely used internationally. It is not confusing or difficult. There are, if necessary, other ways to do it. Newfoundland had two referendums in successive weeks. The French managed to find their way through a similar arrangement and elect a Government. If there are at least three positions, it is only fair to put them on the ballot paper. I welcome the Conservative party's conversion in principle, but I regret that that principle does not seem to want to take Conservative Members into the Lobby in a few minutes' time.

The Secretary of State for Scotland criticises me for using international examples. He also criticised my hon. Friend the Member for Perth (Ms Cunningham). Given that he once told me that he did not obtain a passport until the age of 50, I regard my international examples as important and relevant to the debate.

The Secretary of State said that we spoke on open-deck buses. I do not remember speaking with the Secretary of State on open-deck buses, but I do remember speaking with the Minister of State on an open-deck bus in front of 25,000 people in the Meadows in 1992, articulating the case for this sort of referendum in Scotland. I see the Minister nodding assent.

The Secretary of State has given a number of reasons why what might have been relevant in 1992 is not relevant in 1997. The basic change is that in 1992 the Labour party was in opposition and in 1997 it is in government. The right hon. Member for Devizes is in a similar position.

If our proposal is right in principle—if it is right to put forward all the constitutional options to the people of Scotland—surely the amendments, which are clear, are worth supporting in the Lobby. I share many of the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). If he examines amendments Nos. 72 to 77—all six are necessary in order to rearrange the ballot paper—I think that he will then find that the options are being put forward in a perfectly fair and reasonable way.

I see as the crux of the debate the fact that the Government do not seem to have realised that they are offering a multi-option referendum. In their two questions, they are offering a multi-option referendum between the status quo, a Parliament with tax-varying powers and a Parliament without tax-varying powers. The difficulty with their multi-option referendum is that they offer the wrong options—the status quo has been widely discredited and a Parliament with no tax-varying powers is not supported by any substantial body of opinion.

Would it not be fairer, more democratic and infinitely more satisfactory if the House were to find within itself the wisdom, just for once, to give Scots a genuine right of self-determination—the right to determine our future by making available to us all the constitutional options facing the nation? It cannot be said by any hon. Member that there is not significant support in Scotland for the concept and the objective of an independent country. That option, therefore, should be on the ballot paper, along with all the other constitutional options.

It being Six o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *put the Question necessary to dispose of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 45, Noes 405.

Division No. 11] **[6 pm**

AYES

Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Day, Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Eric
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Loughton, Tim
Mates, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Spring, Richard
Swayne, Desmond
Swinney, John
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Elfyn Llwyd and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Sheff'd Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet (Ros'dale)
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Thomas
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*

Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian (Tamworth)
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merchant, Piers
Merron, Ms Gillian
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William (Normanton)
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*

Taylor, Ms Dari (Stockton S)
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis (Wolverh'ton SE)
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steven
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and Ms Bridget Prentice.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being quarter past Six o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *put the Question necessary to dispose of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 360, Noes 66.

Division No. 12] **[6.18 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis

Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

NOES

Allan, Richard (Shef'ld Hallam)
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Thomas
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Colvin, Michael
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Duncan Smith, Iain
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Greenway, John
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David (Somerton)
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard (N Essex)
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Livsey, Richard
Maclennan, Robert
Mates, Michael
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, James
Webb, Steven
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Mr. Donald Gorrie.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Sir Alan. It arises out of the previous Division, and the conduct of Divisions in the House in the entirely unprecedented situation in which we find ourselves. According to "Erskine May",

"Under Standing Order No. 39, if the Speaker or the Chairman considers that a division is unnecessarily claimed, he may, after the lapse of two minutes, take the vote of the House or committee by calling upon the Members who support and those who challenge his decision successively to rise in their places; and he thereupon, as he may think fit, either declares the determination of the House or the committee or names tellers for a division."

That provision allows votes to be taken without the ritual of going through the Division Lobbies. Although it has been used rarely in the past, in the present situation, when the results of Divisions are entirely predictable—the result of one was 400 to 45, and another looks likely to be similar—for the sake of efficient running of the House and use of Members' time, it would be reasonable for us to consider using that provision on certain occasions.

6.30 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Further to that point of order, Sir Alan. Thank you for exercising your duties in the Chair so as to recognise the fact that the Division was not unnecessarily claimed, and was a very proper expression of opinion by hon. Members in the Committee. The procedure described should not be

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

invoked as an alternative to a proper review of the voting system in the House, in the light of the new circumstances.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Further to that point of order, Sir Alan. If Labour Members are concerned about the time that we have to debate the measures before us, perhaps they should have thought twice about applying such a draconian guillotine.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Further to that point of order, Sir Alan. As someone who has been in the House for many years, I have the impression that the excellent procedure described by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) was introduced to stop time being wasted when Members call vote after vote. That is certainly not the case today. Will you also bear in mind the fact that on an issue as vital as devolution, it is desperately important that the people of Scotland and Wales should be able to see for themselves how each Member voted? That would not be possible if the other procedure were used. Do you therefore agree that although it is an excellent procedure, which has to be used on occasion, it should happen only when there is deliberate time wasting?

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) for giving me notice, albeit short notice, that he intended to raise the matter. I think that Standing Order No. 40 was conceived with different circumstances in mind, and I respectfully suggest to the hon. Gentleman that if he would like to pursue his point, that might be better done through the Procedure Committee. Now, if the Committee is willing, we shall proceed to the next amendment.

Clause 2

REFERENDUM IN WALES

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I beg to move amendment No. 68, in page 2, line 7, leave out 'propositions' and insert 'options'.

The Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 70, in page 2, line 9, leave out '2' and insert

'(*Referendum in Wales: Form of Ballot Paper (No. 2)*).'.

No. 207, in page 2, line 9, leave out '2' and insert

'(*Referendum in Wales (No. 2B)*)'.

No. 69, in page 2, line 17, leave out from 'shall' to the end of line 26 and insert

'under prescribed arrangements determine the order of preference of those voting in the referendum as between the options to be voted upon.

(7) "Prescribed" means prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State by statutory instrument.'.

New schedule 1—'*REFERENDUM IN WALES: FORM OF BALLOT PAPER (NO. 2)*—

Parliament has decided to consult people in Wales on the Government's proposals for a Welsh Assembly and the policies of other parties. All four options are explained in the Government's White Paper

Mae'r Senedd wedi penderfynu ymgynghori â phobl yng Nghymru ar gynigon ar gyfer Cynulliad i Gymru a pholisiau'r pleidiau eraill. Esbonnir pob un o'r pedwar opsiwn ym Mhapur Gwyn y Llywodraeth.

Note your preferred options in order or preference by marking "1", "2", "3" or "4" by each option. You need not use every option.

Nodwch yr opsiynau sydd orau gennych yn nhrefn eich dewis drwy ysgrifennu "1", "2", "3" neu "4" gyferbyn â phob opsiwn. Nid oes raid i chi ddefnyddio pob opsiwn.

A	DIM NEWID NO CHANGE	
B	CYNULLIAD ETHOLEDIG fel a gynigir ym Mhapur Gwyn y Llywodraeth AN ELECTED ASSEMBLY as proposed by the Government's White Paper	
C	SENEDD GYDA PHWERAU I DDEDDFU AC AMRYWIO TRETHI A PARLIAMENT WITH LAW-MAKING AND TAX-VARYING POWERS	
D	HUNAN-LYWODRAETH O FEWN YR UNDEB EWROPEAIDD SELF-GOVERNMENT WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION	

New schedule 10—'*Referendum in Wales (No. 2B)*—

Part 1

FORM OF FIRST BALLOT PAPER

Parliament has decided to consult people in Wales on the Government's proposals for a Welsh Assembly or independence for Wales.

Put a cross (X) in the appropriate box:

I AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO CHANGE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF WALES

or

I AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE A WELSH ASSEMBLY

or

I AGREE THAT WALES SHOULD LEAVE THE UNITED KINGDOM.'.

Amendment No. 123, in title, line 4, after 'Assembly', insert

'and other constitutional proposals for Wales'.

Mr. Jones: This bank of amendments allows us to shift the axis of the debate in Wales away from the rather sterile arguments about the status quo and whether we should have constitutional change, to a more intelligent and less confrontational level. Indeed, it would allow us to consult the people of Wales not only on whether they want change but on what kind of change they want.

Such an approach is well within the spirit of inclusive politics that has been trumpeted by Welsh Office Ministers since the election, so their response to the debate will be an early sign of whether that new spirit of inclusive politics is meaningful.

Once we lift the debate to a different level and concentrate on the powers that any Welsh body will have, we can have a mature discussion on the way ahead. Let me make it clear at this early stage in the debate that this is not simply a party political issue in Wales.

There is a range of opinions within parties in Wales about the powers that an elected Welsh body should have. In the last Session of Parliament, the Government of Wales Bill—which called for an elected body with legislative and tax-varying powers—was given a First Reading and received support from all parties. The Bill was proposed by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and sponsored by his Labour colleagues the hon. Members for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) and for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd). The Bill was also sponsored by the former hon. Member for Montgomery, Alex Carlile, and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. The Conservative former hon. Member for South-East Cornwall, Sir Robert Hicks, was a sponsor, as were my hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and I on behalf of Plaid Cymru. That clearly showed that there was cross-party support for an elected body with legislative and tax-varying powers. From the opinion polls published in Wales in the run-up to the general election, it is clear to me that of those who favour constitutional change, a substantial majority favour legislative powers and a clear majority favour tax-varying powers.

One of the features of this debate that is in marked contrast to the debates of the late 1970s is that sections of the Conservative party in Wales and in Scotland are rethinking their approach to the topic. There was a tradition in the Conservative party of having an open mind on this issue, but that was stifled during the Thatcher years. One can well understand the Conservatives' need for change in the aftermath of the Tory wipe-out in Wales and in Scotland, and it has been refreshing to read the comments from Sir Wyn Roberts in Wales and Malcolm Rifkind in Scotland. How different their approach is from the flat-earthers now occupying much of the Tory Benches.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it was not in the interests of the people of Wales for the Government to have fixed the timetable motion so that the group of amendments starting with amendment No. 48—one of which was tabled in my name—has no chance of being debated?

One of those amendments would have given the Welsh people the opportunity to vote for exactly the same tax-raising powers as the people of Scotland. It is a great pity that the Government felt that they could not explain why they will not give the Welsh people that option. Does the hon. Member agree that we should appeal to the Government to come out of their shell, be honest and tell the Welsh people why the powers to be offered to Scotland are not to be offered to Wales?

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has strong views on the matter, for raising it in that way. I agree with him, and a number of the amendments grouped with his were tabled by me and some of my hon. Friends. I invite him to look at the wording of amendment No. 68—to which I shall refer later—which may allow him to develop his argument in that context, even if his amendment has not been selected.

All the amendments seek to do is to give the people of Wales an opportunity to be consulted on the real choices that face them and to enable the debate to be much more positive. We understand that the Labour party in Wales will want to campaign on its own proposals for an executive Assembly, but widening the options—as the amendments propose—would give the electors an opportunity to listen to all the arguments on constitutional change.

6.45 pm

Within this group of amendments, there is the opportunity to support a multi-option referendum. That would be fair, because it would give the people of Wales an opportunity to vote for the programmes put forward by the four political parties in Wales at the last election. Why should the only choice facing the people of Wales be between the status quo and the Labour party's proposals? Why should the Conservative party's programme—which was so decisively rejected by the people of Wales at the general election—have priority on the ballot paper? Its position is preserved, and the people of Wales will yet again have an opportunity to reject the Conservative status quo option.

In the circumstances, and given that hon. Members representing seats in Wales come from the Labour party, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats, why should not the option favoured by the Liberal Democrats and my party be on the ballot paper? In the spirit of inclusive politics, the Government should surely take that on board. The group of amendments gives us the opportunity to vote for a multi-option referendum. The hon. Member for Wrexham has stated that had there been sufficient time, there would have been an opportunity to consider other options, including legislative and tax-varying powers. We would have liked an opportunity to have such a debate because we could then have looked at all the available options.

There are people in Wales who are asking why Wales should be treated differently from Scotland. Why are the Scots deemed to be mature enough to be allowed to vote for a Parliament with legislative and tax-varying powers, but, for some reason, the people of Wales are not? What difficulties might be created if a Welsh Assembly was established with only secondary, not primary, legislative powers? What would happen if the framework of legislation was set up here in Westminster by a Government of a different political complexion from that running the Assembly? There will be a straitjacket.

[Mr. Jones]

Members of the Assembly could pass only secondary legislation on the back of primary legislation, which could have been imposed by a Conservative Government in Westminster. If the Assembly wanted to change primary legislation and invited Westminster to do so, what priority would be given in the administrative and legislative logjam at Westminster to legislation sought by a Welsh Assembly? These are questions which could have been answered if we had had an opportunity to widen the referendum question.

The group of amendments does not allow us to have a vote specifically on legislative and tax-varying powers as a discrete option, but we may want to divide the Committee on the amendment that would allow Members to vote on the principle of widening the questions. I invite hon. Members to look at amendment No. 68, which proposes to remove the word "propositions" from clause 2(2) and replace it with the word "options". If the Committee supports that amendment, we will be content to leave it at that. In other words, the Committee would have voted for the principle of widening the options. In the spirit of inclusive politics, we would leave it to the Government to decide what second question they would want to add later—perhaps in another place.

If the amendment is passed, the Government will need to look at the mood of the debate and the views coming from different parties to see whether there is a general demand for more questions to be included, and what kind of questions they should be. In the spirit of inclusive politics, the Secretary of State would want to consult other parties about the nature of those second or third questions. I hope that those hon. Members present who favour further questions—but who may not want to go all the way and support a multi-option referendum—will feel happy about supporting an amendment that simply looks at the principle.

I think that the Secretary of State will realise that there is a strong argument in Wales on the issue of parity with Scotland. It is strong at not only an emotional but a rational level. People simply cannot see the difference between Wales and Scotland on the issue. I ask the Secretary of State to reflect on the strength of opinion on the matter, and I know that he and his colleagues will want to carry support across the parties that have a positive attitude to the subject.

This is the Government's opportunity to reach out to all shades of opinion in Wales and bring them into the debate in a positive and constructive way. We make this offer to the Government: if they accept the amendment and consult on the second and third question, they will have an opportunity for all shades of opinion to be reflected. I think that that is a reasonable offer.

Mr. Martin Caton (Gower): Thank you, Mr. Lord, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this important debate on a referendum that will decide how Wales is to be governed in the new millennium. I continue a long and proud tradition of Labour representation in the Gower constituency that goes back to 1906 when John Williams was elected as Gower's first Labour Member of Parliament. He was followed by D. R. Grenfell, supported by the South Wales Miners Federation, and then by Ifor Davies. I never knew either D. R. Grenfell or Ifor Davies, but there are a number of people still living in the constituency who remember them both with enormous respect and affection.

I did, and do, know my immediate predecessor, Gareth Wardell. He was my Member of Parliament for 13 of the 15 years that he represented Gower in the House. Many of the hon. Members who served alongside Gareth during that time will know much better than I do the contribution that he made in this legislature. From speaking to his colleagues, in particular his fellow Welsh Members, I find that there is clearly enormous respect here for the work that he did, and especially for his willingness and ability to master detailed subjects.

Alongside those parliamentary colleagues, people all over Wales have recognised and valued the tremendous job that Gareth did as Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, undauntedly leading investigations into all sorts of aspects of public life in Wales over the years.

I know and will remember Gareth best as a superb constituency Member. As a local councillor, I would take constituents to his surgery when I felt that any case needed his involvement. I honestly cannot believe that the concern that he showed for those people or the attention that he gave to seeking solutions to their problems have been surpassed by any hon. Member.

I know that Gareth's friends here will join the people of Gower in wishing him all the very best in his return to higher education as head of geography at Trinity college, Carmarthen. I know, partly because I was told it on the doorsteps so many times during April, that I have a very tough act to follow. I intend to do my very best.

It is probably not common knowledge this far east, but in south-west Wales the residents of the city of Swansea are nicknamed Jacks, and people who live in Llanelli are called Turks. Most of my constituency lies between those two population centres, which has led some bar-room wits to describe us as half Jack and half Turk—or Jerks, for short. People who talk in that way make a big mistake, first, because such terminology can seriously damage the health in the area that I represent, but, more importantly, because the people of Gower may be many things—indeed, they are many, many things—but a bunch of Jerks they are not.

It is a huge privilege to have been elected to represent so beautiful and diverse a constituency as Gower. I am acutely aware of the responsibility that I now carry as its Member of Parliament and I am conscious of the problems that I may well face in the years ahead because of that very diversity.

The Gower constituency cannot be described by any stretch of the imagination as a single homogeneous entity. It snuggles around the south-west and north of Dylan Thomas's "ugly, lovely town" of Swansea, and provides the new unitary authority, the city and county of Swansea, with virtually all its rural population.

On the face of it, being non-urban seems to be all that the various communities that make up Gower have in common. Starting in the south, Mumbles, where I live, is an old fishing village that developed into a seaside resort and has expanded to become part of Swansea suburbia. Mumbles is currently struggling to revitalise and renew itself, always seeking to conserve and treasure the best of what we have inherited from the past.

To the west is the Gower peninsula, which most people think of when the Gower constituency is mentioned. It was the first designated area of outstanding natural beauty

in the country, and a wonderfully fascinating combination of coast, countryside and estuary for palaeontologists, archaeologists, historians, zoologists, botanists, oceanographers or holidaymakers.

Even the peninsula itself can be divided at least into two. South Gower, with its glorious cliffs, caves and sandy beaches, is much more anglicised, even in place names and pronunciations. North Gower, on the Loughor estuary, is equally beautiful in its own way and still holds on to the Welsh language in villages such as Crofty, Llanmorlais and Penclawdd.

Penclawdd is, of course, the home of Gower cockle gathering, with the only commercial cockle beds in the country where people can harvest all year, every year, because they refuse to use mechanical drags; they still hand-rake and gather, thereby ensuring a sustainable shell fishery that provides an environmental example for the whole of Europe.

South Gower also provides a fine example for sustainable living and community action. Holtsfield is a remarkable collection of wooden chalets in a wonderful woodland setting, just outside the village of Bishopston, where more than 20 families are trying to live in harmony with their beautiful surroundings and the wider community.

Unfortunately, a property development company has different ideas. It has bought the land and is seeking to evict those chalet dwellers, who are resisting with enormous resolve and imagination and who have the support of the vast majority of the rest of the population of Bishopston, which was wrongly thought of previously by many people as merely a dormitory village for Swansea commuters.

Coming off the peninsula on the North Gower road, one enters Gowerton and begins to meet the community whose recent history is the history of coal, steel and tin. Like the rest of south Wales, it has suffered terribly from the economic decline of, especially, the past two decades.

Villages such as Loughor, Pontybrenin, Penllergaer, Penyrheol, Garden Village and Grovesend have over the years melded together around the central village of Gorseinon, but their sense of identity as separate communities remains strong, as I found out during the election campaign when I accused someone from Loughor of living in Gorseinon. She gave me the strong impression that she would much rather have been described as a "Jerk" than as a resident of her neighbouring village.

Those communities have learnt, often the hard way, the importance of solidarity to achieve common objectives and to enable fulfilment of individuals. They are strong, Welsh, socialist-minded villages where people and families look out for one another and are prepared fiercely to combat what they perceive as injustice. That is probably even more true of the separate settlements of Pontardulais, Garnswllt, Craig Cefn Parc, Pontlliw, Felindre and Clydach, all directly to the north of Swansea.

The tragedy of those communities is that so much of the tremendous talent and quality that exist there has been undervalued and wasted for so long. Very few jobs have come in to replace those lost in mining and steel. Even the small number of manufacturing employers based in the constituency have been shedding jobs in recent years. The decline is reflected in the commercial centres of the larger villages. One has only to walk the main streets of Clydach, Gorseinon or Pontardulais and see the number of empty shops and charity shops to understand why the posters declaring "Britain is booming" that sprouted this spring seemed like a sick joke to people who live there.

7 pm

The different parts of Gower vary enormously because of geology, geography, history and relative wealth, yet there is much that unites us wherever we live in Gower, as became clear to me during the general election campaign.

First, in every part of the constituency there is still a sense of community, an acceptance that we are responsible one for another; a belief that there is such thing as society: Secondly, many of the concerns are the same in the different communities. In every part of Gower, there is equal concern for improving our schools and colleges, rebuilding our national health service, protecting our environment and providing jobs for our young people and the long-term unemployed. When we come to ask the people of Gower, and of the rest of Wales, to vote for the creation of a Welsh Assembly, those same concerns will still be at the top of those people's minds.

I believe that there are enormously powerful constitutional and democratic arguments for making the Welsh Office accountable at last to the people of Wales. Those arguments are even stronger when we consider the might of the quangocracy that has grown up in Wales over the past decade and a half. However, I do not believe that it will be those arguments in the main that will win us the referendum in my constituency or across Wales. People will vote yes if they are persuaded that a democratic Welsh Assembly will provide a vehicle for creating a first-class education system for all our children; if they believe that our Assembly will play a central role in developing a national health service in Wales that can and will deliver quality treatment and care whenever they need it; if they are convinced that a Welsh Assembly can ensure that environmental protection will be at the heart of all policy-making in Wales in the new millennium; if we can show them that our Welsh Assembly—their Welsh Assembly—will be an engine for harnessing the skills and talents of the population of our country, to regenerate our economy and create decent jobs for our people.

We must prove that democracy in the form of a Welsh Assembly is not merely a nice idea if we can afford it, but an essential, practical mechanism for improving the quality of life of the people of Wales. I am sure that we will.

Tempting as is the amendment so eloquently moved by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), it is time for the Labour Government to carry out their pledge to offer the people of Wales the chance to vote to create the sort of Assembly described in our manifesto. It is time for the democratic debate to move on, to engage with the people of Wales. It is time for all of us who believe that extending democratic accountability in Wales can and will help deliver the goods on education, health, the environment and jobs to prepare ourselves for the task of campaigning to secure a massive yes vote in the autumn.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): I heartily congratulate the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) on his excellent maiden speech. It is a test of a maiden speech as to whether one can mention all the villages and communities in one's constituency. I know his constituency well, and he had a jolly good go.

[Mr. Richard Livsey]

My paternal grandmother, a redoubtable Welsh speaker who hailed from Alltwen, took me to Penclawdd when I was three or four to pick cockles. That has been etched on my mind ever since. People still do that in almost the same way, but one no longer sees donkeys there. He has a wonderful constituency to which he paid good tribute, as he did to his redoubtable predecessor, Gareth Wardell, who did a superb job as Chairman of the Welsh Affairs Committee.

Amendment No. 68 deals with multi-options. In theory, it is very attractive. If Wales had a multi-option referendum, there would be four choices. First, there would be the Government's proposals. Secondly, we would have the Liberal Democrat proposals for legislative and tax-varying powers, and a more thorough system of proportional representation, although we hope that that may be proposed in the Government's White Paper. Certainly, we favour a federal solution for Wales, which is an entirely logical way of proceeding towards the unity of the United Kingdom and a successful legislature.

Thirdly, there are Plaid Cymru's proposals for an independent Wales in Europe. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) moved his amendment well, and that option would appear on a multi-choice ballot paper. Finally, there is the status quo, which was wiped off the map in the general election. That view has been defeated. As we have heard, some members of the Conservative party in Wales are having a rapid rethink, going back to the drawing board and saying that perhaps, after all, there is a possibility of meaningful government in Wales with devolution. I believe that more still will do so before the referendum is put to the Welsh people.

Clearly, this is a complex situation. We are trying to maximise support for a Welsh Assembly. Perhaps the choices should include a question asking people whether they favour a Welsh Assembly, and if so, what option they favour. It might be more logical to go about it that way.

We did not have a constitutional convention in Wales, which I regret. I approached the Labour party five years ago on two occasions to ask whether it was possible. I know that the former Member for Montgomery, Alex Carlile, did the same. We did not have the benefit of what they had in Scotland to have a proper debate. It would have been helpful, because the debates on the Scottish referendum have shown that there is perhaps a greater unanimity of purpose. It is certainly not the Liberal Democrats' purpose in Wales to frustrate the Government's efforts to create a Welsh Assembly. Polls before the general election showed that the Liberal Democrat federal proposals for tax-varying and legislative powers were the most popular options among people who favour a Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): The hon. Gentleman has more than once spoken of a federal situation. Will he spell out his idea of a federation? We know that Plaid Cymru's patriotism is based on resentment of the English. That is why it put forward the proposition of a Wales in Europe. It does not want a Wales in Britain. What is the Liberal Democrat policy on the federal idea?

Mr. Livsey: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's intervention is helpful. As 20 to 25 per cent. of the population of Wales originates from the other side of Offa's dyke, if we are to win the referendum, we must get everyone, of whatever origin, to support a yes vote. We should not go down the path that he offers. He asked what a true federal situation was. I can spell that out simply.

In a federal Britain, the functions of the Welsh Office should reside with the people of Wales. That means that primary legislation that could affect those functions should be possible. Other functions in a federal Britain should be operated from a United Kingdom Parliament in Westminster. Those functions could be defence, macro-economic policy, foreign policy and other matters of wider impact. Other functions could operate on a European scale—for example, the environment, where problems of environmental degradation know no boundaries. All those scenarios are entirely logical. There are plenty of examples around the world, including Canada, Australia and the United States, of countries that operate successfully under a federal system.

Mr. Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The hon. Gentleman said that one of the responsibilities of this Parliament would be macro-economic policy. Surely the Liberal Democrat party supports a federal Europe and a single currency. If that is the case, does he recognise that macro-economic policy in a federal Europe would be in the hands not of the United Kingdom Government but of the European central bank?

Mr. Livsey: I shall leave those questions for the contenders in the Tory party leadership contest. The hon. Gentleman opens up a big debate, and I shall not be led down that path.

In a multi-choice referendum, we could end up with just two questions such as, "Do you favour the status quo?" and, "Do you favour independence?" We hear Conservatives debating that situation ad infinitum, as if those were the only two choices that existed. Of course, there is a coalition of view elsewhere that we need a Welsh Assembly in order to achieve devolution. Such an Assembly is a much more constructive way of going forward and of achieving meaningful and effective government within Wales.

I have some sympathy with the multi-option referendum. It has been referred to as a preferendum. It is inclusive. People could vote for their own options and still produce an overall majority in favour of a Welsh Assembly. However, people in Wales must be united, especially at this time. They require leadership. I and my party are determined not to let slip this opportunity. We must combine across party boundaries to secure a yes vote in the referendum. That referendum is coming soon—in September. We do not have time to consider the possibilities of a multi-option referendum. That would delay a straightforward vote on whether Wales needs an Assembly and whether people in general want it.

We have to remember that, although many of us fervently back the creation of a Welsh Assembly, many aspects of constitutional reform do not interest all the people of Wales. People look on it as an academic exercise. They just know that they are in favour of devolution. The individual powers of such an assembly, which are important, have to be debated and defined within a Wales Bill.

Those of us who have been waiting a long time for a Welsh senedd believe that it is better to proceed with one question. Although we have sympathy with a multi-option referendum, we must achieve a coalition of views in Wales if we are to win the referendum. Now is certainly not the time to hesitate, so we shall not impede the progress of the Bill. The people will decide. The options can be considered later when the Wales Bill goes through the House.

Mr. Rowlands: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) on a wonderful and excellent maiden speech. He reminded us not only of the constituency with which many of us are familiar in both campaigning and personal terms, but of the remarkable representation that he follows in the form of Gareth Wardell. I also knew Ifor Davies as a Member of Parliament and a Minister in the Welsh Office in the 1960s. My hon. Friend said that he had a hard act to follow. I think we all agree that he has made an excellent start.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) moved the amendment. I recently read some internal memos and documents from the late 1950s on the development of Welsh administration and on Welsh constitutional change. In minute after minute by Mr. Henry Brook, the then Minister for Welsh Affairs, derisory, insulting references were made to the Joneses wanting to keep up with the Macs. I find offensive the notion that we have to follow the Macs; that we cannot devise a set of constitutional arrangements that suit our requirements and meet the needs and aspirations of Welsh people; the carping belief that we must follow some other model, which may or may not be suitable to another part of the country.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn argued that because the Scots seek to do one thing, we have to follow them. That shows a curious inferiority complex. We should devise our own means and methods of constitutional change. The hon. Gentleman also observed that all the votes except the Tory votes added up to a vote for constitutional change. I would like to believe it, because it would mean that 78 per cent. of the electorate in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney voted for devolution. I do not believe that that is the case. So one should not invoke the argument that the result of the general election was a massive mandate for a Welsh Assembly. That is why we decided to hold a referendum, to test public opinion separately.

7.15 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Given that the general election did not reflect the attitude of the people of Merthyr or elsewhere to the constitutional proposals that the Government may make in a White Paper in due course, how can the Government or the hon. Gentleman say that only one constitutional proposal, rather than the full range supported by the various parties at the election, can be put to the people of Wales?

Mr. Rowlands: The vast majority of people in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney voted for a Labour Government. They did not vote for an option promoted by the nationalists, who polled only about 2,300 votes. So the notion that the nationalist option should be included on the ballot paper is not supported by the experience in my constituency or in the rest of Wales.

I put it to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) that I sense a degree of ambivalence even towards a Welsh Assembly within Welsh communities. While opinion has changed, my own political instinct—I speak only for my own communities, not for anyone else's—is that if the prospect of a tax-raising, legislative Parliament is actively promoted during the referendum campaign or in any other discussion, the anti vote will grow. There will be alienation and a feeling that the Assembly will not be a measure of devolution such as we have promised during the past X years. The prospect of a tax-raising Parliament would lead not to a stronger vote for devolution, but to a stronger no vote. In terms of practical politics, it would increase the scepticism, if not the opposition to the principle of devolution.

I do not support the amendment. Two things have changed public opinion in the past 18 years. First, people have seen for 18 years an unrepresentative Government determining Welsh affairs. We have had Secretaries of State who did not understand, feel or appreciate Wales. They all made an effort, but most of them did not have a feeling for Wales and did not have the democratic mandate of the Welsh people to implement their policies.

The second contributory factor that has shifted public opinion in favour of our devolution proposals is the growing revulsion for the quango state, which my hon. Friend the Member for Gower so eloquently described. That state offends the instinctive democratic instincts of the Welsh people. They have found the huge number of political appointments increasingly offensive. Because of that, it is far more important than any option about tax-raising or legislative powers that our White Paper and our subsequent devolution Bill should include the power to bring to an end decisively the quango state. I hope that my colleagues on the Front Bench heed those remarks.

I am concerned that we appear to be fudging the issue when we say that a Welsh Assembly may at some future date deal with the quango state. It was created by primary legislation passed by the House and it is the job of the Westminster Parliament to dismantle it. If we address that need directly in our White Paper and the devolution Bill, we shall appeal powerfully to the Welsh people. If they vote yes on that basis, they will know that they are voting for the dismantling of the quango state rather than for that possibility to be referred to a future Welsh Assembly. I stress again to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that it is vital that the White Paper states our intention to do that and that our Bill contains the necessary power to do so. Our rhetoric about the quango state must be matched by our legislative action in the autumn.

Mr. Rogers: Would my hon. Friend care to carry his argument a little further? Many of the quangos were set up by a Labour Government. However, because the Conservatives could never win seats in local government, they distrusted it—they even went to the extent of abolishing the Greater London council—and they side-stepped Welsh local authorities and gave their powers to quangos. If those quangos were not dismantled prior to the establishment of a Welsh Assembly, I am extremely fearful about whether the powers that would

[Mr. Rogers]

normally have gone to local authorities would ever be given back to them. We would then get not devolution, but evolution upwards from local authorities.

Mr. Rowlands: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. As the basis of our appeal during the referendum campaign, our devolution Bill must guarantee not only the dismantling of the quango state but, wherever possible, the return of powers to local authorities, particularly from housing quangos. We must demonstrate that we shall legislate to dismantle the quango state, because I believe that the growing revulsion towards it has been a major factor in increasing the mood in favour of devolution. I sense that that feeling has grown in the past 18 years.

Again, I stress to my colleagues on the Front Bench and elsewhere that we must make the right case for devolution. We must not make exaggerated claims about the Welsh Assembly. We must not talk about the huge number of jobs that may be created as a result of its creation, or those that may be lost if that Assembly is not established. The proper case for our devolution Bill is a fundamental democratic one, based on the need for appropriate Welsh administration.

I accept that, in the past, we wanted such Welsh administration and that we set it up deliberately. When one looks at the minutes from the 1950s, there was little Welsh administration, but we built it up with the development of the Welsh Office and the increasing powers of the Secretary of State for Wales. Despite our belief that the Welsh Office should be better scrutinised by a Welsh Assembly, it is accountable, through the Secretary of State, to the House. The quango state is not similarly directly and effectively accountable. We have witnessed growth of a new administration at the Welsh Office and a host of non-departmental bodies, which constitute the quango state. It is their democratic control which will be vital to our campaign for devolution, and not any of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn about the tax-raising and legislative powers of our Parliament.

Mr. Llew Smith: Yesterday, our colleagues on the Front Bench stated that if we did not have a Welsh Assembly, thousands of our people would find themselves thrown on the dole. What evidence has my hon. Friend found to substantiate that claim?

Mr. Rowlands: I do not have to take responsibility for the speeches of my colleagues, but I am sure that they will justify that claim.

It is extremely important that we make the proper case for the Assembly which can be justified and which will not be received sceptically. The Assembly must not be seen just as another political creation. It must address the instinctive feelings and wishes of the Welsh people, who are against the growth of the quango state. We should appeal to the Welsh people on the need for a directly elected Assembly, which will oversee the dismantling of that state and scrutinise and deliberate on the key issues of the Welsh administration that has developed since the 1960s. We should not campaign on the options that the hon. Member for Ynys Môn wants to include on the ballot paper.

Mr. Wigley: I am grateful to follow the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) because I want to address some of his arguments in due course.

First, I should like to congratulate the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) on his maiden speech. Members from all parts of the Committee were warmed by his comments about Gareth Wardell, who was an excellent Chairman of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. I am sure that we all look forward to hearing the hon. Gentleman speak on many future occasions.

One theme that the hon. Gentleman stressed in his speech is important to the debate on a multi-option referendum. He is right to say that if we have an elected Assembly or Parliament for Wales, it must be relevant to the people of Wales in their ordinary circumstances. As he said, it must be relevant to education policy, economic policy, jobs and the health service. It must be relevant to those policies, which have been at the heart of Welsh politics down the years. It is those services which, to some extent, have been undermined by the growth of the quango state to which the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney referred.

Therefore, the question that arises in the context of the comments from the hon. Members for Gower and for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney is how we can make a difference to the prospects of the ordinary people of Wales, whether they live in Merthyr Tydfil, Gower or Caernarfon. It is our belief that, unless the Assembly or Parliament has adequate powers, it will not be possible to tackle the problems that arise.

An example is education policy. We know that the Conservative party tried to privatise education in Wales. We know that from the way in which the Tories introduced nursery vouchers. If there were another Conservative Government, particularly led by one of the right-wing contenders—

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I dislike interrupting the hon. Gentleman, but we are discussing the amendments. The hon. Gentleman is talking in general terms about devolution, but we are talking about a referendum and the amendments related to it.

Mr. Wigley: I shall show you, Mr. Martin, how my remarks are relevant.

If we have an Assembly that has nominal responsibility for education, but no legislative power for it in Wales, the reality is that our educational framework will be determined in this Chamber. Unless we have the power in Wales to pass legislation, we may find that in five or 10 years, or whenever we have the misfortune to have a right-wing Tory Government again, we shall be in danger of seeing our legislative framework being determined here. The Assembly in Cardiff will be unable to make a difference, by protecting the people from the privatisation of primary or secondary education. That will be determined by legislative capability.

Mr. Rogers *rose—*

Mr. Wigley: No, I will not give way. I know that the hon. Gentleman is busy going around the Welsh local

authorities advocating the policies of his colleagues on the Labour Front Bench. He is persuading those representatives that Labour's proposal is important and will help those authorities. I am sure that his time will be well cut out for him. During his rounds, he can tell the people in the various local authorities in Cardiff, Rhondda and elsewhere how the educational framework may well veer again to the right unless the Assembly or Parliament has primary law-making powers. I believe that the hon. Gentleman has some sympathy with the model of a Parliament with primary law-making powers, as it would be a body relevant to the problems.

7.30 pm

Our multi-option amendment deals with the central question of what the people of Wales want. A year ago, there was not to be a referendum; then, the leader of the Labour party decided, for whatever reason, that there would be one. It was meant to be an inclusive referendum to find out exactly what the people of Wales wanted. Apparently, that is something that cannot be determined at a general election—many other matters can be determined, but apparently not this issue.

That being so, we must look at the four options being proposed by the various parties: the status quo, advocated by the Conservatives—or, at least, some Conservatives, as many Welsh Conservatives are thinking again about their party's position; the Assembly, without primary law-making powers, advocated by the Labour party; the federal model, advocated by the Liberal Democrats; and full self-government within Europe, advocated by Plaid Cymru. Apparently, the proportion of support for each of those four models cannot be judged from a general election result. That is the basis on which the Government are putting forward their proposals.

What is the support, as far as can be told, for the various models? Based on the NOP and Beaufort polls in Wales last year, it appears that of those who are in favour of, or not against, the concept of an elected Assembly, 71 per cent. are in favour of legislative powers and 69 per cent. in favour of tax-varying powers. If that is true and the people of Wales want an Assembly that has those powers, why are the opportunities to vote for those models being denied in the referendum? If it is a consultative referendum to find out what the people of Wales want, why will they not be allowed a full range of choice? Through our amendment, which allows for a 1, 2, 3, 4 vote on the four options, we could find out exactly what the people of Wales want. On that basis, it would then be possible to introduce relevant legislation.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): The central question is how to maximise support for a yes vote in the referendum. As a representative of a party that rather grandiosely and incorrectly describes itself as the party of Wales, the hon. Gentleman should accept that that is the central question. Does he accept that a multi-option referendum would engender confusion and deny that central goal?

Mr. Wigley: As was explained in a previous debate, multi-option referendums have been run successfully in other countries. I do not think that the people of Wales have greater difficulty than the people of other countries in comprehending these matters. If it causes the hon. Gentleman a problem—and from what he said it clearly does—we could attack the issue from a different angle. We could have two questions: first, whether people want an Assembly, and secondly, whether people want legislative powers. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) tabled an amendment along those lines. It is another way of reaching the same determination. If the hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Mr. Thomas) has difficulty with a 1, 2, 3 transferable vote, it could be overcome in that way.

The people of Scotland are being allowed a second question, but the people of Wales are being denied that second question on the legislative powers that we believe to be essential if the Assembly is to be successful.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman may find my remarks more friendly that he anticipates. Does he find it insulting that not only are the Scots to have two questions and the Welsh only one, but the Scots are to be allowed to vote a whole week or more before the Welsh? I understand that it is an attempt to use the Scottish vote to influence the Welsh.

Mr. Wigley: Until we see the White Paper, we do not know the details of what will happen. However, one aspect of the Government's case is that it is necessary to differentiate between the arguments relevant to Scotland and those relevant to Wales. To that extent, it is a wise precaution to hold the vote on different days, so that there can be a focusing on the issue in the media—given that most of the mass media come from London and are seen in Wales and Scotland alike.

If the people of Scotland are being offered a Parliament with law-making and tax-varying powers, which can develop considerable clout within the European Union, it is absolutely essential that Wales has the opportunity to develop those powers as well. The clout of Wales in the EU will be that much stronger if we have a Parliament that can have a credible voice in Brussels. Catalonia and the Länder governments in Germany have successfully developed their prospects within Europe and it is essential that Wales likewise has that opportunity.

It is important that when the White Paper is published, we are able to understand exactly what the powers will be, because at the moment it is difficult to reach a decision. However, we know that there are various themes. The Secretary of State has said in the past that the status quo is no option.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ron Davies) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Wigley: I note the right hon. Gentleman's agreement.

In the referendum proposed for Wales, the status quo is an option. It is the only option being offered other than the Government's policy. The options of Liberal Democrat policy and Plaid Cymru policy will not be offered. The option of a law-making Parliament, which is supported by many members of the Labour party, is not to be put to the people of Wales. Between now and the completion of the Bill's passage through the other place, I ask the right hon. Gentleman to look for a vehicle to allow the people of Wales to be genuinely included in a decision-taking mechanism in the referendum.

[Mr. Wigley]

If that is not to be the case and if there is a yes vote, the right hon. Gentleman will have his Assembly and he can build on that. I respect that. But if there is a no vote, it will not be worth the paper it is written on, because the reason for it will be unclear. Was it because people did not want that much power, or was it because they wanted law-making powers and a strong Parliament? The former Welsh Minister, Sir Wyn Roberts, has said that he would vote yes if there was the option of tax-varying powers. Without that second question, a no result would be absolutely meaningless. The Secretary of State must address that aspect. This is a vital debate and it is important that we get it right.

Mr. Ancram: I congratulate the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) on his eloquent maiden speech. He was particularly eloquent in his tribute to his predecessor and in his attachment to his new constituency. We look forward to hearing further speeches from him.

I listened to the debate with a certain amount of ambivalence as I heard the arguments in the Scottish debate being put slightly differently in this Welsh debate. It is interesting that in this debate, as in the other, I find myself sympathetic to the proposal to have more than two questions in the referendum.

I listened carefully to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). He, like me, finds it difficult to be precise in his reaction because without the White Paper we are not certain of the nature of the proposals that will be put to a referendum. I again make the plea that the White Paper is produced in good time. I make the same suggestion to the Secretary of State for Wales that I made to the Secretary of State for Scotland—that in accordance with declarations about future White Papers, he might consider attaching a draft of the Bill to his White Paper so that by the time of the referendum the people of Wales will have a full and clear idea of the detail of the issues.

The referendum, as currently set out, contains two questions: whether there should be a Welsh Assembly and whether there should not be a Welsh Assembly. Having listened to this and previous debates, it is clear that various people will vote for a Welsh Assembly for very different reasons. The hon. Member for Caernarfon said that a no vote would be complex; I think that a yes vote would be even more complex. I suspect that some people, such as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), will support an Assembly because they believe that ultimately it will lead to an independent Wales. After all, that is the purpose of their party. They will see it as part of that process and will therefore vote for it. On the other hand, others will vote for a Welsh Assembly—I include the Secretary of State in their number, because I have listened closely to what he said in previous debates—because they believe that it will retain and, indeed, buttress the United Kingdom. Therefore, the so-called maximisation of the vote for an Assembly, referred to by the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey), will be constructed on two totally contrary purposes. To claim that that is an endorsement on which an Assembly can be built would be dangerous ground on which to build.

Mr. Rogers: Surely the right hon. Gentleman grasps the point that the issue of an independent Wales has been put in front of the electorate of Wales time after time after time by the Welsh nationalist party and the nationalists have never got more than or even as much as 10 per cent. of the vote. In the last general election, the people of Wales completely rejected the one policy on which the nationalist party stands, so what is the point of putting it in as an option in the referendum?

Mr. Ancram: Doing so would at least underline whether people were voting for an Assembly because they wished it to lead to an independent Wales, or because they wished it not to lead to an independent Wales. That is a relevant question and the only way it can be answered is by having a multi-option question that sets out the issues fairly and firmly.

Having said all that, however, I have to point out that because of the guillotine and the way in which it has affected the debate on the amendments, the amendment on which our vote is being sought this evening is not one that fulfils those criteria—it goes further and looks for order of preference to be part of the process. I repeat what I said in the previous debate: the idea that constitutional issues should be decided by second or third preferences would be a novel concept indeed and one that I certainly could not support.

On that basis, I say that although I support the principle of the amendment and the reasons why it was tabled, neither I nor my Front-Bench colleagues can vote for the amendment and I cannot ask my Back-Bench colleagues to do so. Nevertheless, a relevant issue has been raised and the Government have to address it. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will answer the questions raised. If he does, it will be a first because none of his colleagues from either Wales or Scotland has done so in previous debates.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): I begin my reply to this good debate by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) on his excellent speech. It was a model maiden speech—confident, articulate and witty—and I was especially delighted to hear him because we are neighbours in the Swansea valley. We share a road in the socialist village of Trebanos and I was delighted to hear him use that term. I welcome him to the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) made several telling points and I share his desire to deal with the quango state. The White Paper will address that matter. However, we must not pre-empt the Welsh Assembly and its own obligations to deal with the matter.

Mr. Denzil Davies: I was reading the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales on 16 May. He said that the Assembly

"will have powers to reform the quangos".—[*Official Report*, 16 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 350.]

But having powers to reform the quangos is not the same as the devolution Bill reforming the quangos. Will the Minister give an assurance that the devolution Bill will itself reform many of the quangos and subsume them into the Assembly?

Mr. Hain: My right hon. Friend makes a similar point to that made by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr

Tydfil and Rhymney. The point is an important one, and it will be addressed by the White Paper. When the White Paper is published, they will see what the detailed proposals are.

The issue of jobs was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Smith). I say frankly that, yes, I do believe that if we do not have a Welsh Assembly, jobs in Wales will be threatened, investment will be threatened and the strength of the Welsh economy will be threatened. Let me explain why. The Scots will get a Scottish Parliament; next year London will get the opportunity to vote for an elected authority; and the regions of England will follow within a matter of years thereafter—the north-east is already pressing hard for an elected authority. Is my hon. Friend really saying that Wales should be the only part of the United Kingdom that does not have a devolved form of government? In those circumstances—especially with the English getting regional economic development agencies—I believe that job prospects in Wales will be threatened if we do not have an Assembly. A Welsh Assembly will give us the power and the authority to reorganise the Welsh economy to protect jobs and, indeed, to increase employment and tackle unemployment.

Mr. Llew Smith: My hon. Friend the Minister just said that if we do not have a Welsh Assembly, thousands of jobs will be threatened. First, in yesterday's press release from the Welsh Office, he was talking not about jobs being threatened, but about jobs being lost. Secondly, if we take his argument to its logical conclusion, is he also saying that we have LG investment because LG recognises the possibility of a Welsh Assembly in the near future?

Mr. Hain: We got LG investment because the company knew that there was a Labour Government coming and knew that it wanted to be in a Wales ruled by that Labour Government. In a modern economy, inward investors will be attracted to Wales if there is an Assembly to assist with the development of our economic strategy.

7.45 pm

Mr. Flynn: The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) made the point that the LG jobs might not have come to Wales if it had had a Welsh Assembly. He was entirely wrong. As someone who was involved in the decision to bring the LG jobs to Wales and who discussed at great length with LG executives their decision to bring the jobs to my constituency, I know that they knew, as did everyone else, that a Labour Government were almost certainly coming and that a Labour Government would bring a Welsh Assembly. They are entirely comfortable with the idea of being in Wales under a Welsh Assembly. The links between Korean investment in Wales, which stretch from Caernarfon to Merthyr to Cardiff and to Newport, are very strong and will be greatly strengthened when we have our own Assembly in Cardiff.

Mr. Hain: I take my hon. Friend's point. This is not simply an erudite constitutional matter, and these interventions have focused our attention on the fact that this debate is about jobs, health, schools and housing. If we get a measure of self-government in Wales, we will better be able to deal with all those issues.

Let me now directly address the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones). He effectively advanced the proposition that there should be what is called a preferendum and I respect his right to argue that case—indeed, given his party's policy, he has a duty to argue it. He did so constructively and in an inclusive spirit, which I acknowledge. However, I have to say that his policy at the general election was roundly defeated and that our policy won overwhelmingly. We are putting that policy in a confidence vote in the referendum, which will take place later this year.

People in Wales do not want separatism; they do not want Wales to break away from the United Kingdom. We do not want more taxes; under the Tories, ordinary people in Wales have paid more taxes than ever before.

Dr. Marek: Will my hon. Friend the Minister give way on that specific point?

Mr. Hain: On that point, yes.

Dr. Marek: It is an important point, so I ask my hon. Friend to give a concise and intellectual defence of the reasons why the people of Wales are not being offered the same choice that is being offered to the people of Scotland.

Mr. Hain: The defence is clear: we did not give in our election manifesto a commitment to give tax-raising powers to the Welsh Assembly. *[Laughter.]* It is no laughing matter. That commitment was given in the election manifesto to the people of Scotland. We are honouring our election manifesto in Wales, just as we are honouring it in Scotland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney said, Scotland is different from Wales, which is why there are different propositions for Scotland and Wales.

People in Wales want the enormously powerful functions of the Welsh Office to be exercised by democratically elected people from Wales; that is our policy. The new Welsh Assembly will be a very powerful institution. No doubt it will evolve over the years. When, in 1964, James Griffiths was established as the first Secretary of State for Wales, it was not nearly as powerful a position as it is now, and no doubt there will be opportunity for it to evolve in future, but we need a Welsh Assembly to make it possible.

I want to address the points made in the amendments tabled by, among others, the hon. Members for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and for Ynys Môn. There is great potential for confusion in what one might regard as a complex multiple choice examination paper, the "preferendum" that is suggested. It is quite possible that no single majority view will be expressed for any of the options. Where will that leave us, given the arguments and the momentum for devolution and decentralisation in Wales? It might leave us where the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) and other Members want to leave us—with the devolution process delayed or abandoned. I urge hon. Members not to fall into that trap.

Several technical questions have not been answered by the hon. Member for Caernarfon and his colleagues. Would the multiple choice referendum be conducted on a first-past-the-post basis, as they have suggested, or by single transferable vote? If it was conducted by single

[Mr. Hain]

transferable vote, which would allow a majority view to be expressed after preferences had been transferred, it would be the first time ever that that electoral procedure or form of preference had been used in any referendum or election in Britain.

The referendum in Wales on this vital principle should not get bogged down in a complicated voting arrangement tried out for the first time. We want the people of Wales to have a simple, straightforward and clear choice—yes or no: "Do you support the Government's policy, which we advocated in our manifesto, on which we received an overwhelming mandate to establish a Welsh Assembly, or do you not?"

The greater the yes vote, the more authority the Welsh Assembly will have, and the bigger will be the mandate from the people to make progress in the House in the months to come. In those months, the negative, destructive, filibustering tactics that have been attempted by the Tories in the past few days will be used. We do not want to give them an opportunity to pursue them.

On one of the ballot options that the hon. Member for Caernarfon has proposed—envisaging self-government within the European Union—it is not clear whether Wales would be a sovereign state or something different. If he proposes a full sovereign state of Wales in the European Union, that would require a treaty amendment, because it would enlarge the European Union. A unanimous vote by European Union members and a new intergovernmental conference would be needed. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman seriously wants us to go down that route simply to create a Welsh Assembly.

We made a contract with the people on 1 May for a referendum in Wales to enable the people of Wales to express their precise view on this question. We spelt out exactly the terms of the question when we said that it would be on a Welsh Assembly, and we are now implementing that commitment, as we did our commitment regarding Scotland. We are keeping our promises. It may be novel, given the Governments of the past 18 years, for an incoming Government to keep their promises, but we are doing so and deserve credit for it. We are inviting the electorate to endorse a clear principle that they will support our policy for an elected Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): How can my hon. Friend reconcile his argument that we are putting a specific proposal to the people of Wales with his argument that the Assembly might subsequently evolve? If he believes that it may evolve, why does not he give the Welsh public the option of choosing an evolved form?

Mr. Hain: I believe that my right hon. Friend, whom I respect as a colleague in the West Glamorgan area and for his role in Parliament in the Welsh group, is confusing two points. We shall outline in the White Paper our policy for a Welsh Assembly; that is what will be voted on. That is what will be legislated for in Parliament thereafter. I am simply making the obvious point that one cannot bind future Parliaments and that a future Welsh Assembly may be able to evolve in future. There is nothing contradictory in inviting the people of Wales to vote on the policy set out in the White Paper.

I see that the shadow Secretary of State for Wales has finally turned up to the debate, very late in the day.

Mr. Ron Davies: He is canvassing.

Mr. Hain: He is canvassing, is he, for extra votes? That displays the typical arrogance that the Tories have shown in the past few days for the mandate that we have received from the people of Wales, and which they definitely have not received. Indeed, the real opposition in Wales to the Government is sitting on the Liberal Democrat and nationalist Benches, because there is no opposition in Wales on the Tory Benches.

I pay tribute to the Liberal Democrat and Plaid Cymru Members who have spoken. I especially appreciate the constructive spirit in which the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) made his contribution, especially bearing it in mind that his grandmother is from Alltwen. She comes from very good stock, as it is in the Neath constituency.

I hope that we can move forward together to get a massive yes vote in Wales for an elected Assembly in Wales, because Wales must not be left behind in a movement for democracy that is being unleashed throughout Britain. We have this historic opportunity to modernise our system of government, to bring power to the people of Wales and to decentralise decision making.

The referendum and the Bill—in defeating the amendment, we shall carry through the Bill—will give us the opportunity to take forward the battle for democracy and get rid of 18 years of degenerate, corrupt Tory rule in Wales and strike forward on a new path of democratic devolution in Wales.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: I join the congratulations to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Caton) on his excellent maiden speech. I was proud of the fact that he mentioned the village of Garnswllt, where I was brought up and educated, so I am sure that he will be looking after the residents of Garnswllt very well, like his predecessor, Gareth Wardell.

The Minister made heavy weather of technical arguments against more than one question. I find it rather strange—I put it no higher than that—that the people of Scotland are mature and grown up enough to consider that they might have to vote on two questions, but somehow the people of Wales are not that mature—that it would be too complicated for the people of Wales to have more than one question, but not too complicated for the people of Scotland.

I also find it strange that the Minister should say that the people of Wales cannot be bothered with tax-raising Parliament, yet the people of Scotland can be. What is the difference? He seems to me to be making very heavy weather of it. I understand that he wants to advance the proposals made by the Labour party, and he is entitled to do so; the Government have a mandate on that.

The Minister told the Committee—a point that I did not fully appreciate—that the people of Wales decisively rejected Plaid Cymru at the general election. They rejected the Conservatives decisively, yet the Conservative position is maintained on the ballot paper. The status quo is there. The Conservative option is being voted on. What is the problem in putting the option suggested by the Liberal Democrat party or Plaid Cymru?

I find it strange that the Government cannot make the connection there, in the spirit of inclusive politics, to bring people together.

The amendment does not tie the Government's hands by committing them to a multi-option referendum but enshrines the principle of options. The Government can consider what options might be appropriate, after consulting the people. There is no hard and fast reason why the referendum should be multi-option.

The Minister said that a multi-option referendum would be different from the kind of question to be put to the people of Scotland. There was an opportunity, which the Government did not take, to debate questions similar to those being put to Scotland. The amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) provided that opportunity, but it was denied because of the guillotine.

I ask the Government to recognise that there are strong feelings across all parties in Wales that we should consider all options. In order to gauge the strength of feeling in the Committee, we shall divide the Committee on the amendment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 20, Noes 330.

Division No. 13] **[7.59 pm**

AYES

Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Chope, Christopher
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dafis, Cynog
Duncan Smith, Iain
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Hancock, Mike
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Lidington, David
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Paterson, Owen
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Swinney, John
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tyrie, Andrew
Welsh, Andrew

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Elfyn Llwyd and
Mr. Dafydd Wigley.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony

McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Graham Allen and Jane Kennedy.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Clause 2 commits the Government to holding a referendum in Wales on the Government's proposals. Many people have talked about a referendum in the past, but the clause actually commits the Government to providing one.

Before going any further, I want to pay tribute to the new Member for Gower (Mr. Caton)—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I appeal to hon. Members for quiet while an hon. Member is addressing the House.

Mr. Morgan: I am grateful to you, Mr. Martin, for your protection. I was just going to say how good the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower was. I have a special interest in this because of my family history. My hon. Friend is my mother's and brother's Member of Parliament, as was Gareth Wardell before him. I knew from my hon. Friend's delivery of his speech that he is going to be a superb representative of the whole constituency of Gower—including my ancestral home of Cwmcile in the northern part of the constituency. It was there that my great-great-grandfather, Morgan Morgan, at the height of the Rebecca riots, shot—I am not sure whether he killed—Colonel Napier, the head of the Glamorgan yeomanry; aided by his mother, who struck with a frying pan one of the sergeants who had been sent to arrest him.

The relevance of all this to proceedings on the clause is that it took place in the 1840s, when the people of Wales, in Gower and across west Wales—including the area from which the former Home Secretary comes—were rioting because of the way Wales was being run. At the time, Wales was run by the squires and their friends by means of a system of quangos, very much as it was, increasingly, during the past 18 years. The squires appointed the justices of the peace, the poor law guardians, and the turnpike trusts. It was against these trusts that the Rebecca rioters rebelled. Finally, there were the school boards. It was very much the squire and his pals—a squirearchy—and there was widespread rebellion. The Chartists were active in some of the industrial areas, such as Newport, and in the rural parts of west Wales including Cwmcile and the Gower area. The rebellions were specifically against the turnpike trusts and the imposition of taxes.

What the rebels wanted was democracy. At that time, because Wales did not have a proper democratic franchise, it was run very much in the interests of the squires and the landowners, and, by and large, only the squires and their friends could vote. That is one of the reasons why, when the secret ballot was introduced, the tenants lost their fear of being evicted if they did not vote for the squire or his nominees to come to this place and represent them. Ever since then, Wales has voted against the Tory party. It has never forgotten the lesson that it was taught by people like my great-great-grandfather Morgan Morgan in the Gower constituency, and the spirit that they represented. My great-great-grandfather may have gone too far on that occasion, but the lesson of that period of rebellion in the 1830s and 1840s—of the Chartists and the Rebecca rioters—is very relevant to tonight's debate.

During the past 18 years, the Tories have tried to turn the clock back and reproduce a Victorian society in which the squire and his pals—or, in this instance, the Tories and their pals, by means of quangos—took Wales away from what its people thought that they had gained by

securing the secret ballot and the universal franchise. My hon. Friend the Member for Gower may not want to assault the captain of the Glamorgan yeomanry—indeed, the Glamorgan yeomanry no longer exists—but I know that he has done a very good job for all the people of Gower. I also know that, by supporting clause 2, we can do the job for which the Welsh people were looking in the 1840s.

How do we achieve some form of democracy in Wales, and how do we ensure that the people of Wales can secure what they want by means of a democratic system? That does not mean shooting the Glamorgan yeomanry, and it does not mean riot, but it does mean using the ballot box and democratic procedures, and that can be done only if people respect the fact that there is a deep-rooted dislike of the Tory party in Welsh history.

In that respect, there is a difference even between Wales and Scotland. Members of Parliament—perhaps they include you, Mr. Martin—may be old enough to remember a time when Scotland actually produced a Tory majority. That happened at the 1955 election. We have never done that in Wales: we have a very different history. We have not voted for the Tory party since the secret ballot was introduced, and, given the spirit of Wales, even if the ordinary people had been able to vote back in the 1830s and 1840s they would undoubtedly not have voted Tory then. It was only because of the phoney, funny franchise that operated at the time that occasionally the squire's pals would get in. Clause 2 is a way of putting right all the injustices that Wales has suffered because of its inability to secure a form of democracy that would give it some control over its domestic affairs.

The clause will give Wales a chance to have its own Welsh Assembly. It does not commit the Government to establishing such an Assembly; it does something even better, because the Government are committed to two forms of direct democracy. The manifesto for which everyone in Wales voted so overwhelmingly on 1 May said that people could vote for the party that would bring them—among other things—a Welsh Assembly, subject to having the direct democratic right to veto that Assembly. After all, some people in Wales might be in favour of a Labour Government but against a Welsh Assembly. The manifesto said that those people could vote for Labour on 1 May, but could vote against the Government, given the right to veto a Labour proposal, in a direct referendum that would be held in the autumn.

That is a very democratic action. That is what the Tories denied Wales back in the 1840s, and what they took away from Wales when they reduced local government powers by appointing all their pals to quangos during the 18 years which, thankfully, came to an end on 1 May. That is why I think that clause 2 is so important to the history of Wales, and to the relationship between Wales and this Parliament.

It could be said that we have a unitary state, and that we should worry about all the anomalies that will be created if Wales and Scotland have separate Assemblies or Parliaments. We hear people express worries about the so-called West Lothian question, as though it were a reason for doing nothing to modernise the constitution. We have heard Opposition Members express, by implication, the view expressed by the Prime Minister when he referred to a thousand years of British history, suggesting that in some way the constitution of this country was immutable; but it has never been immutable, particularly when it comes to the relationship between England and the Celtic fringe.

Over the centuries, there has always been a need for change in regard to the way in which we deal with relationships with the small Celtic countries—Ireland in the 19th century, and Scotland and Wales later in that century and, indeed, in the 20th. In our Parliament, we have always found it necessary to adjust the relationship between England and the other countries. England is, in that context, a very big country, comprising 82 per cent. of the United Kingdom population. As for the three small countries, or provinces, Scotland has 9 per cent. of the population, Wales 5 per cent. and Northern Ireland 3.5 per cent.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Could not the problem be solved by the establishment of three Grand Committees composed of Welsh, English and Scottish Members who would pass their own domestic legislation? Would that not avoid the extra expense, the constitutional problems and the West Lothian question?

Mr. Morgan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his constructive contribution, and for his acceptance of the principle of what I am saying.

England is a big and a dominant country, containing well over three quarters of the UK population and of its Members of Parliament. It is a case of the elephant and the three Celtic fleas. Obviously, when people have fleas they scratch from time to time, and there is currently a desire to readjust the relationship between, in this instance, England and Scotland and Wales. Under the last Government, an attempt was made to readjust the relationship between England and Northern Ireland. That does not mean that the British constitution will collapse; if it did, the British constitution would have collapsed every time we readjusted the way in which we dealt with the affairs of Scotland, Wales, Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.

I was very pleased by what the Prime Minister said about the Irish potato famine. He apologised to the people of Ireland for the part that the British Government had played in it, and that is very relevant to clause 2. Before the famine, everything was about expanding the United Kingdom constitution to take in first Wales, then Scotland, then the Republic of Ireland. The potato famine, however, was such a devastating experience for one particular Celtic country that its people never forgot it, and it eventually left this Parliament altogether.

After the famine, the issue was no longer expanding to take over the rest of the British Isles—Wales, then Scotland and Ireland—but establishing new rights for the Celtic countries, with Secretaries of State for Scotland, then Ireland, the setting up of the Stormont Parliament in 1922 and the Republic of Ireland becoming an independent free state in the same year before leaving the Commonwealth and the Crown altogether in 1949. Since the famine, the readjustment has gone the other way. In general, it has worked to allow the Celtic countries of the United Kingdom to have more say in their own affairs, and clause 2, in two ways, gives more say to two of the Celtic countries for which this Parliament is responsible. It establishes the prospect of a Welsh Assembly and a Scottish Parliament, but establishes it via an additional

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hurdle that the legislation will have to cross by way of a direct vote by the people of Wales and Scotland in the autumn.

This Parliament should not be frightened of that. During the past 150 years, every 30 or 40 years, there has been a major change in the relationship between England and the three Celtic countries, or, putting it another way, between this Parliament as a whole and the amount of respect that is given to the diversity of those three Celtic fleas. England is in the middle, with well over 80 per cent. of the total population, wealth and representation in the House of Commons. The Government have committed themselves to a very democratic measure, which I welcome.

One could say that, in adjusting the relationship, the Celtic fringe countries are asking for more recognition of their diversity and tradition. For instance, there is the tradition that we in Wales do not vote Tory, and our commitment to helping to bring about the welfare state.

Looking at it from a Welsh perspective, one could say that we are looking for a boyo-diversity treaty; a readjustment of the relationship between Wales, England and Scotland. In the spirit of asking for that boyo-diversity treaty, I hope that the House will give warm approval to clause 2.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

It being half-past Eight o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *put the Question necessary to dispose of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clauses 3 to 6 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.

8.30 pm

Mr. Hain: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill is short and simple and my contribution can be similarly brief. During the debate on the Scottish amendment my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) took up a point with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland about the provision of local information in Wales. We are discussing with the chief counting officers at county borough level the provision of information and our intention is that it will be released. But, if possible, we want the result to be declared nationally first. We are discussing how both those objectives can be accommodated and we shall announce our conclusions in due course.

The Bill authorises the holding of referendums in Scotland and Wales as the first step in the Government's programme of radical constitutional reform. A mood for constitutional change is abroad in Scotland and Wales and the referendums will give people in each country the opportunity to express their views on the Government's devolution proposals. We promised them that opportunity and we now intend to deliver on that promise.

We do not have to do this. Our election victory gave us a clear mandate for our policy to decentralise power to the people of Scotland and Wales. We could simply have proceeded with the necessary legislation, but we want to secure popular support for those policies, as our manifesto promised.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: The hon. Gentleman is just doing as he is told because the referendum policy was decided in London, not by Wales.

Mr. Hain: When we have a serious contribution from a Welsh Conservative Member of Parliament, he might have a serious answer to such a question.

We did not have to do this, but we decided that we wanted the authority of the people to support our legislation. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), who is waiting for the Tory party leadership election result, will recognise that if and when we have a yes vote in Scotland and Wales, Parliament must respect that yes vote.

Last time, some 30 days were spent on the devolution question—nearly 15 weeks of parliamentary time during which the then Conservative Opposition behaved in a typically destructive and negative fashion, filibustering through the night as best they could. We intend that Parliament will respect the mandate given by the people of Scotland and Wales in order to support the legislation that we will introduce.

Mr. Dalyell: I was there and my hon. Friend was not. There was serious discussion. People such as Enoch Powell on the one side and others of us on the other did not filibuster. I saw it at first hand.

Mr. Hain: The last thing that I would accuse my hon. Friend of doing is filibustering. I was talking about the Conservative Opposition. They would have done the same this time had they had the opportunity.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hain: I shall give way in a minute.

What we are proposing is sensible and the Government have chosen to introduce the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill first. That way there will be an efficient use of parliamentary time. There is a clear mandate from the people for the introduction of legislation and that is a sensible use of parliamentary procedure and time.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will the hon. Gentleman, please, apologise to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). The hon. Gentleman was not here when we debated devolution. I was, as was the hon. Member for Linlithgow. The debates were serious. They showed true division on both sides of the House. Many Labour Members were deeply unhappy about devolution in Scotland and in Wales. The Labour Government of the day did not attempt to drive the Bill through like a steam roller. The hon. Gentleman should be thoroughly ashamed of himself for what he said.

Mr. Hain: My hon. Friend does not need any assistance from the Tory Benches to make his case. He is probably the most effective and admired Back Bencher in the House. I made no criticism of his role in that devolution debate.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his position.

He referred to the outcome of the referendum. If, as he hopes, it is a success and he comes back to the House with a detailed devolution Bill, he has said that we should not thwart the will of the people of Wales and Scotland. To that extent, does he also accept that the detail of those Bills is important to the success of what comes about? Therefore, will he undertake not to try to do what the Government have done this time, which is to ram some tight guillotines through from day one?

Mr. Hain: Of course the detail of the Bill is important and it will be considered with due care and attention by the House. It is a matter for the Procedure Committee to determine how that will be done. Our proposals for devolution for Scotland and Wales are different because they reflect the different historical circumstances and the modern-day realities of each country. But in each case they will allow diversity to flourish and the implementation of policies reflecting local circumstances and traditions and national needs. We must get away from the idea that London decides everything, regardless of local people's wishes, especially in the context of the nations of Scotland and Wales.

We also intend to get rid of the unelected Tory quango state which, during 18 years, the Tory Government ruthlessly packed with their own people who could not get elected through the ballot box. One English Secretary of State for Wales has been bad enough without him reproducing himself on virtually every quango in Wales. The Tories have developed a new meaning to the word "cloning" in Wales by their use of the power of the quango exercised through an English Tory Secretary of State.

What a rabble the Tories have represented in the debates on the Bill. They have made no constructive contributions. The only constructive, serious and intelligent contributions have come from Liberal Democrat and Scottish National party Members on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hain: No, I will take no more Tory interventions.

The reason why the Liberal Democrats and the nationalists have made constructive contributions is that they represent constituencies in Wales, unlike Tory Members.

It is good to see that the shadow Secretary of State for Wales, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks, has graced us with his presence at this late hour in the debate. Neither he nor his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) seriously addressed themselves to the issue of giving people an historic opportunity to vote for increased democracy in Wales and in Scotland.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe indulged himself in his usual barrack-room lawyer style, picking up a brief and indulging in all sorts of tit-for-tat debating points, but he never addressed the substantive democratic issues. Similarly, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks employed his best Oxford Union style in taking up a series of detailed debating points without seriously addressing the democratic issues. That is no surprise because the Tories have forgotten how to address democratic issues. In 18 years, they flouted every democratic tradition in Britain and imposed a centralised, elitist form of government on both Scotland and Wales.

When I dealt with the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks as Secretary of State for Wales, I respected the way in which he conducted his duties. I remember, however, that when he first took office, he walked into rooms all over Wales and was given a standing ovation. He thought that that was because he was popular; it was simply because he was not the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). It is important that we move forward in a spirit of unity in the House—

Mr. Robathan: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hain: No, I will not take any more interventions. I want to give as much opportunity as possible to Back-Bench Members to contribute to the Third Reading debate. I have taken plenty of interventions from Conservative Members.

Mr. Robathan *rose—*

Mr. Hain: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman can make a speech in the time left to him before 10 o'clock.

The questions set out in the Bill invite the people of Scotland and Wales to express support for our devolution proposals. We will set them out in detail in the White Papers which are to be published before the House rises in the summer. I look forward to a constructive and informed public debate on those plans in each country. I hope that representatives of the Conservative party will make their contributions in a positive and constructive spirit. That will be the Government's intention.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): On that point, will the Minister now do what the Prime Minister conspicuously failed to do earlier today, which is to apologise for the misleading information the Prime Minister gave to the House on 14 May? He said:

"Of course the Bill will be published in time for the referendum".

Mr. Hain: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is intervening in the way for which he has become well known in the House, taking up a misleading point rather than addressing the central issue. I say to him and his Conservative colleagues who represent English constituencies that England voted for devolution as well. The Conservatives received only 34 per cent. of the vote in England—a minority vote in England. The then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), made the break-up of the United Kingdom, as he misleadingly put it, a central issue in the election campaign. He and his fellow Conservatives lost the argument.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Gentleman now answer the question that I put to him a minute ago? Will he apologise for the misleading information given by the Prime Minister to the House on 14 May? He said:

"Of course the Bill will be published in time for the referendum".—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 64.]

May we please have an answer to that question?

Mr. Hain: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is the person who should apologise for attempting to divert the

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debate from the central issues of democracy and devolution which we have been discussing. He has hardly been here to listen to the arguments. The Prime Minister made the position absolutely clear this afternoon.

Mr. Salmond: Conservative Front-Bench Members might consider why they did not ask that question on 14 May, but we will leave that to one side. Would it not have been better if the Prime Minister had simply told the House today that he was sorry and that he had made a mistake?

Mr. Hain: The Prime Minister made the position absolutely clear. I will speak to the hon. Gentleman in a constructive spirit; I welcomed the constructive spirit in which he and his colleagues contributed to the debate. What is important, once we have the White Paper which will be published later this summer before the House rises so there will be plenty of opportunity to discuss it and consider it in the weeks that run up to the referendum, to those of us—the vast majority of Members—who support democracy and decentralising decisions to local people, on a national basis in Scotland and in Wales, is that we unite for a yes vote. That is absolutely vital. We must not allow the Tories to divert the people of Scotland and the people of Wales from our historic mission to get democracy brought back to our people and to get decisions brought down close to the individual. That is our mandate; that is our historic obligation. We were given the mandate by the people in the massive landslide victory on 1 May, and all of us—Government Members, Liberal Democrats and nationalists—have a duty to unite, grasp the opportunity, move forward and create a democracy in Britain of which we can be proud.

8.44 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): We have reached Third Reading, and in my view and that of my hon. Friends we have done so extremely prematurely. The debates have not done justice to the importance of the Bill or to its detail. We have just witnessed four clauses and two schedules of a constitutional measure being agreed to without any debate at all, which is a disgrace to the procedures of the House. That is what we have come to with the Government's arrogant behaviour. They have been unbelievably arrogant to treat the House in such a way.

There is no finer example of such arrogance than the speech of the Under–Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain). Despite the fact that holding referendums was a manifesto commitment, the hon. Gentleman proudly and magnanimously announced that the Government did not need to do so. The Government have a responsibility to implement what was in their election manifesto.

Mr. Hain: The point that I was making was that we did not have to put the commitment in our manifesto but that we wanted to do so because we have confidence in our policies engaging popular opinion and receiving support.

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the Labour party felt that it had to include the commitment in its manifesto in case it lost a large number of votes in Wales and Scotland at the election. It wanted to be able to say to the people, "Don't worry, you can have a referendum about it later."

The Under–Secretary of State not only derided people who spoke on the matter in the 1970s; he criticised Opposition Members for raising detailed points when that is exactly what debates on Bills are for. He criticised me for receiving standing ovations around Wales. If he continues to make such speeches, he will never enjoy that experience for himself.

The Secretary of State for Scotland referred to the Bill a couple of days ago as a modest measure. It is not a modest measure: it is a measure of great importance, which is how he described it a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Flynn: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I will not give way for the moment. Many of my hon. Friends want to speak. Debate on a measure of such great importance has either been severely limited or denied. We do not dispute that the Government have a mandate to hold referendums. We believe that it is right for them to hold referendums on the subject. Indeed, we welcome the Labour party's belated conversion to the idea of holding referendums on devolution. The Scottish Labour party had five policy positions on the matter in five years—indeed, it had three in two weeks. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) reminded the House a few minutes ago, it was decided in London that Labour party policy would change.

Although the Secretary of State for Wales has just left the Chamber, I make no apology for reminding the House of his famous remark on 24 June 1996, when he said:

"The trouble with a pre-legislative referendum is that there are so many questions that you cannot answer."

Three days later, it was his policy to hold a pre-legislative referendum. How true it has become that the trouble with a pre-legislative referendum is that there are so many questions that one cannot answer, since there have been so many questions that Government Front Benchers could not or have been unwilling to answer in the debates. The Secretary of State for Wales was right—he is not often right and it was a pity that he changed his mind—on one of the rare occasions when he came out with a perceptive and perspicacious remark about the folly of holding pre-legislative referendums.

Mr. Salmond: On the subject of parties changing their minds on this issue, on what date did the Conservative party decide that in principle it was in favour of a multi-option referendum in Scotland, as we were told this afternoon?

Mr. Hague: The Conservative party is entitled to set out its policies without having to report to the Scottish National party on what date it developed its policy. We have stated in the House today that the multi-option referendum policy is one with which we would have sympathy. If the amendments tabled by my hon. Friends on a multi-option referendum had been selected, we would have voted for them. It has been a side effect of the guillotine motion, which has denied debate on large

parts of the Bill, that my hon. Friends have not been able to vote on or argue for the amendments that they had tabled.

Mr. Flynn: The right hon. Gentleman would not have noticed, because he was absent himself, but for the major part of the debate no Tory Whip has been present and only one or two Tory Back Benchers have been in their places. On the subject of losing votes, does he not take responsibility for making devolution his one priority in the election? He went prancing around with balloons and told everyone that we had 72 hours to save the Union. He is personally responsible for the worst election result the Conservatives have had in Wales. If he had been standing for a Welsh seat, he would not be here now. Will he introduce a note of humility and apologise to his colleagues who used to represent Welsh seats, because his leadership destroyed their position?

Mr. Hague: The hon. Gentleman may have noticed that the final opinion polls of the general election campaign—which, as it turned out, accurately forecast the result of the general election—showed that opinion on a Welsh Assembly had moved to 34 per cent. in favour and 37 per cent. against by the end of the campaign. The hon. Gentleman should make no presumption yet about who has won the arguments or about the result of the referendum in Wales when it is held. Labour Members made assumptions about the result of the referendums in 1979 and they regretted it. I advise the hon. Gentleman not to make such assumptions on this occasion.

The Government have ignored in their handling of the Bill the truth spoken by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on Second Reading when he said that the devil is in the detail. They will hold referendums without being able to give the public the detailed implications of what they propose. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) has just reminded us, the Prime Minister told us on 14 May that the Bill would be published before the referendums were held, but he was too mealy-mouthed today to recognise either that he had made a mistake or that he was backtracking on the commitment that he had given. The Prime Minister should have had the courage and the confidence to admit that his statement was a mistake or that he had backtracked on his commitment.

As it is, we are promised a White Paper. We do not know whether the White Paper will answer the questions to which the electorate need answers before voting in the referendum. We do not know whether the White Paper will be able to explain the relationship between a Welsh Assembly and non-departmental public bodies in Wales, or between an Assembly and local government in Wales. We do not know whether the White Paper will explain the Assembly's power to call for persons and papers, its relationship with the Committee of the Regions, the role of the civil service, the resources that the Assembly will have at its disposal, the running costs and the remuneration of its members, its impact on inward investment, or how its electoral arrangements could be changed in the future. We do not know whether a White Paper will cover those subjects.

The Government do not know whether the commitments that they will make in a White Paper will still be intact after the referendum has been held or after the legislation has passed through the House. If the Government are asking the electorate to vote on specific proposals in a White Paper, can they now say that the provisions of the White Paper will not be changed after the referendum has been held? They can give no such commitment. They are asking the electorate to vote for a pig in a poke; that is no way to hold a referendum in a parliamentary democracy.

It should be a basic principle of referendums that the electorate should be as well informed as possible about the proposition on which they are voting. That principle could be satisfied only by holding the referendum after the legislation had passed through Parliament, not before. It should be a basic principle of referendums that people should know exactly what they are voting on. They cannot know exactly what they are voting on when a pre-legislative referendum is held.

Our second objection to a pre-legislative referendum—after the fact that it leaves the electorate in the dark—is that the Government clearly intend to use the holding of a referendum as a substitute for the parliamentary process rather than as an addition to it. The Government clearly intend to use the result to say that the electorate have now voted on the general proposition and that nobody else should dare to argue with the details of the legislation.

The Under-Secretary of State for Wales said that the House would decide how the eventual legislation would be handled, but that is not the reality. The House will not decide, because Labour Members would vote for any proposition put forward by the Government even if it meant dealing with the whole Bill in a Committee lasting five or 10 minutes. Most Labour Members would be prepared to vote even for that proposition if the Government Whips said that they should.

The Government have to decide. It is the Government's responsibility to say that constitutional legislation should be dealt with on the Floor of the House. It is their responsibility to give us the guarantee that we have asked for—that that Bill will not be guillotined in the disgraceful way that we have seen happen to the one before us. They must guarantee that the abuse of the rights of the House will not continue. As we come to the end of proceedings on the Bill, they are not prepared to give those guarantees.

What confidence can the Opposition and people outside the House have that debates on the legislation which may follow the referendums will be treated fairly and properly when the Prime Minister has described the prospect of debates on such legislation as "game playing", when the Secretary of State for Wales has said that he will brook no interference with his plans, and when we have seen the cavalier use of the guillotine over the past two days?

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Is it not arrogant in the extreme to confine the principles of what the eventual Bill will contain to a White Paper while putting no detail whatever in the referendum? Members of Parliament do not know what the Bill will contain, and the voters at large do not know either: the final Bill could be totally different from what they expect when they vote in the referendum.

Mr. Hague: My hon. Friend is right. The effect of a pre-legislation referendum will be that the electorate can be kept in the dark and that Parliament can be told afterwards, "You had better pass this legislation in the detail in which it was presented in the White Paper because the electorate have already approved it."

[Mr. Hague]

We favour the holding of referendums on the proposals. Indeed, we believe that that is essential, given the rejection of such proposals in 1979. None the less, we shall vote against Third Reading, for two reasons.

First, to hold a referendum now means that the electorate will not be properly informed: no provision has been made for the fairest possible debate and people are being asked to decide without a specific question and without the specific information that they need to come to a reasonable conclusion. The Government are asking for a referendum just so that they can get away with asking for general approval of vague proposals before the implications can be fully understood by the electorate. The Government intend to use that device to get around proper scrutiny rather than to facilitate it, and to escape full debate rather than to encourage it.

The second reason why we shall vote against Third Reading is that the opportunity to debate the full implications of what is proposed has been denied, even in Committee. There has been no opportunity to debate the procedures to be used in the referendums or the financing and conduct of the campaigns. We have not been able to discuss whether people should be asked about the tax-raising powers of a Welsh Assembly, nor the introduction of a threshold. Ministers have derided, as frivolous or esoteric, amendments tabled in good faith. The amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), concerning the voting rights of service men, was protested about yesterday. Yet that is a subject that should have been discussed in the House. When we consider such amendments, we can see how the denial of debate has obstructed the proper consideration of the legislation.

The Government have done that without need and without justification. They have relied on the argument that they have a mandate, and ignored the fact that the House as a whole has a mandate to give proper scrutiny to legislation, and that all Members of Parliament, from all parts of the United Kingdom, should have the right to propose amendments. The Government have been utterly blind to the case for any amendment to their legislation. A pre-legislation referendum was conceived by Labour party spin doctors last June, and now the Government's attitude is, "This is the law; we say this is the law." Law is permitted only if it was made in Hartlepool last June, when the decision about a referendum was made.

The Government have been unwilling to consider the case for any amendment, and unable or unwilling to answer most of the questions that have been put to them. They have conducted the debates on the proposals in a way which can lead only to bad law. For that reason, the official Opposition will vote against Third Reading.

8.59 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): A certain humility might have been expected from the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) in the light of his party's record and the position that he and others adopted during the election. They made devolution—or the fragmentation of the United Kingdom, as they saw it—and a little Englander view on the continent the centre points of their election strategy. The public decisively rejected the Tories' little Englandism abroad and their wrapping themselves in the flag in respect of the future of the United Kingdom.

One is bound to ask what claim to authority or legitimacy the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks has to make his points, since his party was so decisively rejected at the general election. He referred to the guillotine, and I think that most people of common sense—having seen the way in which the amendment paper has been swamped by often flimsy and irrelevant amendments—would say that the Opposition's clear intention was not to have a proper debate, but to prolong the debate for as long as possible. I would hope that when we come to the devolution Bill itself, the Opposition—rather than seeking to swamp the amendment paper with the aim of having excessive debates—can reach a reasonably agreed timetable.

I am aware of the precedents in relation to constitutional Bills, but key elements of the Finance Bill, for example, may be discussed here in the Chamber, while matters of less importance may be debated in Committee. I hope that that system will be adopted in respect of the devolution Bill. Otherwise—as the Conservative party wishes—other matters will be pushed off the table altogether.

The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks referred to the public wanting to know the details before pronouncing in a referendum. That is clearly absurd. Will the ordinary Welshman or Welshwoman—or Scotsman or Scotswoman—make up his or her mind on the broad package or on details which may or may not be included? Of course there will be a gut response: do people broadly want devolution or not? They will not be moved either way by the minutiae of details. It is therefore absurd to suggest that everything should be cut and dried in advance.

There were many excellent speeches in the debate, but I wish to refer to the remarkable maiden speech by my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Gower (Mr. Caton), who followed proudly and extraordinarily well in the footsteps of our esteemed former colleague Gareth Wardell.

I also commend the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who made the key point that we should not try to oversell devolution by suggesting that it will be a great engine for job creation. We must get through to the people of Wales and Scotland the fact that the Tories have shamelessly bypassed local government and democratic structures for 18 years by creating quangos from which they largely excluded representatives of the majority—from whichever party—by putting in their own people, who often had no credible claim to be Welsh or to represent Wales. One can understand the way in which opinion in Wales has changed only by the strong reaction to the quangocracy created, used and manipulated shamelessly by the Conservative party in Wales. It is on the basis of democracy that the best argument will be made, rather than by trying to oversell the point in relation to job creation. There is a key point, and it is on that basis that we should put the case to the people of Wales.

I would reject a multi-option clause because the key point is whether we want an Assembly. All progressive forces in Wales—all parties with the exception of the Conservative party—accept the case for devolution, and

to argue for a multi-option referendum has the danger that it would be a distraction from that key point; if, for instance, we put before the people of Wales an option in relation to taxation, that could have an extremely negative effect on the referendum result.

We face a choice which arises once in a generation and I do not believe that what we have so far is a coherent package. I think that it should and will alter, because no institution is static. Every institution will have its own dynamic, according to the public opinion at the time. We should listen to the people. Options relating to federalism, taxation and primary legislation can all be debated at the appropriate time.

I shall cite a precedent in conclusion. When the Welsh Office was created by the Labour party, against Conservative opposition, some people argued that it was a puny creature; some were absolutist and said that they rejected that silly little Welsh Office. In fact, it developed incrementally, so that the Welsh Office today is a wholly different creature from what it was in 1966.

In the same way, by the dynamic of public opinion operating on representatives here and in Wales, the Welsh Assembly can be modified and changed and can adapt to new circumstances. That is the essential point. Let us have the Assembly—it will be dynamic, not static—and let all forces of good will and progress ensure that we vote in the same way on this key issue.

9.6 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): May I first say how much I appreciate being called to give my maiden speech so early in the new Parliament and in particular being able to contribute to this important debate?

I consider it a real privilege to be elected as the Member of Parliament for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, following 32 years of distinguished service by my predecessor, Sir David Steel. Sir David made a conscious decision at the start of his parliamentary career to commit himself to the Borders and to be very much a member of the local community. I believe that his close involvement with issues directly affecting his constituents—whatever his other responsibilities, especially as leader of the Liberal party—was the key to his achievements as a Borders Member of Parliament. As I look forward to my first summer as a Member of Parliament, attending the many festivals throughout the Borders, I consider it a great honour to take over responsibility from Sir David as one of the standard bearers for the Borders in Parliament.

The boundaries of the constituency changed over time—indeed, they were changed for the general election—and it now stretches from the Eildon hills in the south, near the towns of Selkirk, Melrose and Galashiels, along the River Tweed, through my home town of Innerleithen, past Peebles and up to the new part of the constituency in Penicuik at the foot of the Pentlands. It is a beautiful part of the world and its landscape has shaped the industries, culture and people of the area over many generations.

Many hon. Members will be familiar with the fierce rivalry between the Borders towns. It shows most clearly on the rugby pitch, but it is evident in many different ways. As an incomer to the Borders—twice over—I am very conscious of the traditions in each of the communities, which give them all great strength. As well as paying proper respect to traditions, people in the Borders have shown themselves to be adaptable, responding time after time to new challenges and demands.

The challenges are significant. My area is heavily dependent on traditional economic sectors such as agriculture and textiles. Those sectors have responded to many different challenges over the years, and continue to do so. Agriculture has been a mainstay of the constituency, but now has to cope with the continuing BSE disaster and the prospect of reform of the common agricultural policy. The textile industry has constantly had to reinvent itself, responding to changing market conditions across the world. More recently, we have developed a highly successful electronics industry and are taking the lead in new businesses focused on sustainable development.

The economic future of the Borders will depend hugely on a new approach from the Government. We desperately need investment in our infrastructure. We have trunk roads, such as the A7, which have lost their status. Others, such as the A701, desperately need further investment. It is a long time since there has been a railway station in the Borders; it is time that stations reopened. We also need a level playing field. Under previous Governments, Galashiels and Penicuik companies which sought assistance to expand their businesses were told that they should relocate to the central belt of Scotland if they wanted help. That cannot be right, and I shall campaign on that issue in years to come.

We also require equal access to grants, not least for investment, training and machinery. Too many young people in the Borders, when they leave school also leave the area—as I did when I left Jedburgh grammar school—and do not return, except in unusual circumstances. Education is vital in the current situation. Industry is more challenging, but parents and teachers are forced to raise money for essential equipment and books in schools. School buildings intended to last 10 or 20 years have been forced to last much longer.

In the health service, a crisis faces local hospitals as trusts debate whether they will have to close wards because of the internal market and the bureaucracy that is choking them and starving them of decent resources. There has been a new mood in the country since 2 May, but the many commitments made by the Government must be backed up by proper resources.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) in an earlier debate complimented the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) on keeping to the subject, and I appreciate that it is appropriate for me to refer to it. Each of the issues that I have mentioned is at the heart of debate on the Scottish Parliament. For too long, especially over the past 18 years, the Government have been remote and unaccountable to the people of Scotland. A Scottish Parliament must tackle each of those issues, but ultimately its success will be judged on whether it better delivers on issues such as health, education and jobs. However, people must be persuaded of that.

I am very conscious that in the past, and at the last referendum, the people of the Borders gave a less than whole-hearted response to the proposals for what was then the Scottish Assembly. The proposals in the White Paper will be crucial in that respect, especially the proportional

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representation aspects of the Scottish Constitutional Convention scheme, which must be the best defence against swapping overbearing London rule for overbearing central belt domination.

The Scottish Liberal Democrats have argued throughout the passage of the Bill that there is no need for a referendum in Scotland. Our voting has followed that logic. Now, however, we recognise the reality of the juggernaut arithmetic that favours the Government. Our priority is a Scottish Parliament. We wish to ensure that it happens sooner rather than later. For that reason, we do not wish to hinder the Bill's progress any further.

9.13 pm

Mr. Rogers: It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), who made a fine speech outlining the aspects of his constituency that he regards as virtues. I am pleased that he did not go on too much about rugby, because his area gave the world the game of sevens. For many years, they beat everyone at it, but now neither Scottish, Welsh, English nor Irish teams can compete with those from the other side of the globe. Perhaps through his area's membership of the British Lions we can put it over the South Africans in the 15-a-side game very shortly. I wish him a long and distinguished career in the House, in the same way as his illustrious predecessor, who not only served his party with great distinction but was a valuable and respected Member for many years.

I come to this debate like an old threepenny bit—with many sides. In 1979, in the Ystrad Mynach Labour club, I and other hon. Members whom I will not mention to save their embarrassment organised the vote no campaign. We had a 4:1 victory in Wales against the same sort of line that we get today—a Labour Government, the chattering classes, the archbishops, the moderators, the head of this and that Church, university professors, bureaucrats and everyone else who has a vested interest in extending the number of bodies that govern the poor people of the Rhondda among other places.

Times have moved since 1979. I certainly recognise that. We had 18 years of Conservative rule. Without any doubt—this is accepted within the Welsh community—the Tories had no mandate whatever. When the injustices heaped on the people of England were also heaped on the people of Wales, it was an easy way out to blame the problems of Wales on the lack of a body to look after the interests of the Welsh people. We are now hearing the same silly arguments that we heard previously.

A university professor wrote a letter to the *Western Mail*, in which he said that if the people of Wales had had the courage to vote yes in 1979, we would not have had the poll tax, we would not have had poor health and we would have had jobs and—the most stupid claptrap of all—we would not have had the miners' strike. I was sorely moved, but I resisted, to write and remind him that the miners' strike started in Nottingham. I doubt whether a Welsh Assembly, even one with powers much greater than what is proposed, could have stopped that. It could not have prevented the high unemployment or the harsh economic realities of the outside world that visited my constituency among others in the valley communities in Wales.

I am not one of those who believe that a Welsh Assembly will resolve the problems of south Wales or my community just like that. The Labour Government have to work a lot harder than that to rectify the problems that we have inherited both from the bad Government of the past 18 years and from the harsh economic realities of the world outside.

I am pleased that a referendum is taking place because it provides an opportunity for the arguments to be put. I am sorry that my Front-Bench colleagues from Wales are not here. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), said—I took the phrase down—that he wanted a constructive, well-informed public debate. So do I. I want democracy to be brought to all our institutions. If people say that we must have a Welsh Assembly in order to have democracy in Wales, are they saying that we do not have it now? I would then ask what is the Secretary of State. Is he an unelected dictator? What are Welsh Members of Parliament? Are they unelected? What are the Welsh Grand Committee and the Welsh Select Committee about? Where is the thread of accountability and democracy? On those grounds, I do not think that a proper argument has been put forward. I am not yet convinced.

I am convinced about another matter, however, which is why I go along with the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is present. There is too much centralisation of government in this country and there is a profound argument for devolving power from here to institutions closer to the people. Whether we have to set up new institutions to do that is another matter. I believe there might very well be existing institutions to which those powers could be given.

We have heard the argument that the quangocracy was set up because the Conservatives could not win seats at local government elections. They therefore bypassed local government and transferred their functions to others, for example, Tai Cymru, Housing for Wales. If we opt for devolution, the first thing that must be done, as some other colleagues have already said, is to take those powers from the quangos and return them to where they belong—in many cases, with local government. When that is done, we must then consider the role of other institutions.

We have heard so much about the principle of subsidiarity. This country is being torn apart constitutionally by people who want to set up new structures, so-called devolved structures. We are being torn apart because powers and functions are being given to Europe and Brussels. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Somewhere in between, someone must stop and start to think about the form of government that we should have. Conservative Members think that I am on their side, but I am not. I am on the side of the Labour party because at least it is tackling the problem positively.

Once we start breaking up the quangos and returning their functions to local government, we can start looking at the structures that we want. That is why I appeal to my colleagues on the Front Bench to consider the future of the quangos at the earliest possible moment.

In fairness to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, some time ago he asked me, knowing my great reservations on the matter, "Why don't you do something?" I have, and I hope to present my findings to him tomorrow. The main thrust of my case will be that

we should consider such matters prior to the development of any relevant legislation because some of the fears that have been expressed are justified.

To be honest, I do not think that the referendum will go through. The last time the vote was lost by 4:1, and my bet, if I were a betting man, would be that next time the vote might go the same way. As for the Labour party mandate for devolution, with all due respect, I was returned to Parliament by 35,000 voters in the Rhondda, but I do not think that any of them voted for me because they wanted a Welsh Assembly. I certainly did not mention that in my manifesto leaflet. Everyone I canvassed there said, "Get rid of that dirty, corrupt, sleazy Government." That is what it was all about. It was not about giving a mandate to anyone, but about getting rid of the Tories. I am glad that that sentiment is recognised.

I will support the Government on this issue because, even with all my reservations, they are positively tackling the problem. As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has already said, a referendum based on a constructive, well-informed public debate is what is needed for Wales. We might eventually be able to get the right solution, but I will not support the creation of another level of government which will take functions away from existing local authorities. That is another issue which must be settled.

I will not support a Welsh Assembly that has the power to decide its own remit, because, by the nature of any elected organisation, it would want to acquire power for itself. I do not believe that the principle of subsidiarity and proper devolution would be served by that.

I will vote with the Government tonight, but I hope that, when the Bill is finally published, my fears, which I will continue to express, will be taken on board and treated constructively.

9.24 pm

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I was greatly interested in the observations of the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers). In particular, I sympathised with what he said about the relationship between central and local government. As a Conservative Back Bencher, I freely admit that since the war this country has failed to get the balance right—especially the financial balance—between central and local government. If we had made a better job of that, much of the demand for alternative forms of devolution would dissolve.

I shall be genuinely brief, in deference to other hon. Members who want to speak. I shall confine myself to one point, which follows on from what the hon. Member for Rhondda was saying. Over the past day and a half of debate, it has become clear that there are many confused and contradictory expectations of what the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly will be like. The reason why the Opposition have taken such a close interest in the wording on the ballot papers is that Parliament must be clear about what questions are being asked. They must be unambiguous and they must be able to deliver a clear result and effect.

We have found it alarming that, for example, the Scottish National party clearly believes that the entire process is aimed at breaking up the United Kingdom, whereas the Government believe that it is a way of cementing and reinforcing the United Kingdom. The SNP believes that, at the end of the process, the Scottish Parliament will be a sovereign Parliament—or will rapidly become such.

The Liberal Democrats believe, in general terms, in home rule and a degree of sovereignty for the Scottish Parliament. The Government, I think—although it is not clear—intend that the Scottish Parliament will be subservient to the Westminster Parliament. I should be grateful if the Minister could make it clear beyond dispute that this Parliament, in which we sit, will be legally superior to the Scottish Parliament. We must be completely clear about the constitutional arrangements.

All the other parties are coming together to urge a yes vote, but all the parties cannot be satisfied by the outcome. The contradictory expectations will become clear only when it may be all too late. The Government say that everything will be revealed in a White Paper, but this House has no control over that White Paper. The other Opposition parties would be most unwise to rely on any White Paper to sort out matters that should be made clear in legislation before a referendum.

Whatever the imagination put into the White Paper, we will be left with an in-built contradiction between the aspirations of a Scottish Parliament to control matters such as health, education and the environment, on the one hand, and expenditure powers on the other. This Parliament will continue to write the cheques; the Scottish Parliament, even with a tax-varying power, will remain almost entirely dependent on the financial decisions being made in London. Therefore, the imbalance that we see in local government—the subject with which I began my speech—will be magnified in the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Scottish Parliament.

The best way of solving the problem of confusion and contradictory expectations would be to have a referendum after the main Bill had been passed; then, the question would be clear, simple, unambiguous and enforceable. I ask the Government, even at this late stage, to show a little less arrogance and to use the Bill to reverse the order, so that at least the people of Scotland and Wales will be asked to vote on something that is clear.

9.29 pm

Mr. Dalyell: It was 38 and 39 years ago that I was the Labour candidate in Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles, as the constituency of Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale then was, and I endorse what the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) said about the welcome that the people there give to incomers. He represents some very nice, hospitable people, even though they may not be of his political persuasion or mine. They are welcoming people and he is very lucky to represent that seat.

The hon. Member is sitting in the seat that, for so long, was occupied with charm and distinction by Lord Steel, as he now is, whom we knew as David Steel. When David Steel had announced his retirement and we asked about his successor, he described the hon. Gentleman, saying, "He's very nice and he's a better prop forward than I am." We wish him well.

When I say that I have sat here for every single speech in the past two days, it is not to claim virtue but to make a judgment. I say as gently as possible to my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench that, in all this, they have to take into account a point that has been so often missing in our

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discussions and that is that there is an English dimension. There are consequences of the English dimension to whatever action is taken.

I hope that I will be forgiven, but, in the light of the subject raised by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, it is worth making a correction—or at least saying what actually happened in 1978-79, because it is relevant.

The then Bill was produced by two very able Ministers: the late John Smith QC and Bruce Millan, later to be a European Commissioner. They were very clever men and so was Joel Barnett at the Treasury. They were helped by some extremely clever and able civil servants: Sir Michael Quinlan, Sir John Garlick and Sir Brian Cubbon, who were some of the most imaginative civil servants.

The fact is that there honestly was not any time wasting in the House of Commons. The Conservative Members who participated in the debate were Leon Brittan—whatever one thinks about him, he is an extremely clever lawyer—and Enoch Powell, who speaks for himself. Incidentally, it was Enoch Powell who christened the West Lothian question—it was not named by me. The truth is that I had gone on reciting, although not at unwarranted length, the dilemma of Scottish Members of Parliament being able to vote on English matters, but English Members being unable to vote on matters that pertained to Scottish constituencies. It was Enoch who said, with that marvellous overtone of irony, "In order to save time, we are finally seized of the problem. I have grasped the issue." For Enoch Powell to have any difficulty in grasping an issue really stretches the imagination, but that is how it began. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), who knows Enoch Powell well, will know exactly what I am getting at.

However, the devil is in the detail and, as the various issues came up, it was like stones being turned: all sorts of creepy-crawly things, in the form of real difficulties, emerged from under the stones.

At the end, very many people reached the conclusion that there were two solutions: the status quo, or something indistinguishable from that favoured in general terms by the Scottish National party.

It was not a waste of time; it was the House of Commons educating itself. My fear is that in the learning curve we may be back, not at 1979, but at 1977.

Others wish to speak, so I leave this Third Reading by saying to the Ministers that they must soon come to grips with the problems that surround the Barnett formula. There must be a statement on that because, as the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) said, someone is writing the cheques, and the question is, will they continue for ever writing the cheques in conditions that have fundamentally changed?

Secondly, to save time, I say that Ministers must consider the problem that is encapsulated in the Bury, North question.

Finally, a statement must soon be made about the responsibilities and accountability of the civil service. That is a very real problem because, if we are to have a Scottish Parliament, there is a strong suggestion that there must be a separate civil service. If there is not to be a separate civil service, we must be told what that solution is, and soon.

I make a last plea to Ministers. It is not good enough in terms of Parliament for Ministers to present a White Paper, let alone the Bill—which I thought that we were promised—on 25 July, or 27 or 28 July, in the last two days before the recess. In honour bound, the Government really must produce that White Paper by, say, 10 July at the latest, because there must be some parliamentary scrutiny from everyone's point of view. It really would be disreputable suddenly to produce it at the fag end of the Session, when people's to minds were wholly on going away. There must be a serious opportunity for Parliament to discuss what is to be the subject of the referendum.

9.37 pm

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I feel somewhat awed to follow the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who made yet another distinguished contribution to the debate. His speech is evidence of the fact that, as a result of the guillotine, we have had a mere smattering of the arguments that we should have had. I add, with the utmost respect to the hon. Gentleman, that he has criticised some of the amendments that have been tabled, and from him I take that criticism very much to heart; I say no more than that.

I ask Ministers to consider a single question about the Scottish Parliament. From where will the authority of that Scottish Parliament derive? The question in the referendum is very general. The referendum question, and no doubt the White Paper—indeed, the Government's entire position—is about avoiding that issue. Legally, there is no doubt that the power is devolved from the United Kingdom Parliament, which is sovereign, but the Parliament that is being offered in the referendum has been founded on a claim of right of self-government of the Scottish people.

This is not just a theoretical debate. The strains and stresses of real politics will excite the real expectations of the various parties involved in the struggle for power that will result from the establishment of a Scottish Parliament.

Power does not have the quality of an object that can be picked up and transferred. Power is a fluid commodity which flows in an unpredictable way. When the United Kingdom Parliament is in negotiation with the Scottish Parliament about the issues that affect the livelihoods, health, education and well-being of the people of Scotland and of the United Kingdom, how will those issues be settled without the Scottish Parliament reverting to its legitimacy directly from the Scottish people, as opposed to the powers technically delegated to it by the United Kingdom Parliament?

The Bill is designed to obscure an unstable proposition. What is wrong with extending the arrangements of the Scottish Grand Committee, which could decide everything and anything that the British Parliament wanted it to decide, within the framework of a sovereign United Kingdom Parliament? With a Labour Government and a Labour majority on the Scottish Grand Committee, there is nothing that it could not do—and without passing any legislation—except raise the tartan tax. It deals with the famous West Lothian question, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) says.

We Conservative Members of Parliament have been criticised throughout the debate, as though we have no legitimacy to speak on these issues. We speak for the sake

of the arguments that we advance. We do not pretend to speak for the Scottish people or the Welsh people. Ultimately, the Scottish people and the Welsh people are sovereign. They have it in their power to decide their own future. If they were to vote for independence or for a majority of nationalist Members of Parliament, there would be little to argue about in terms of their future, but that is not the choice being offered in the referendum.

This is a have-your-cake-and-eat-it referendum. It panders to the expectations and prejudices that have been aroused by whatever political tensions have existed in the United Kingdom for the past 20 or 30 years. There is no honesty in it.

There is nothing intrinsically democratic in announcing that there is to be a referendum. Clement Attlee described referendums as potentially a device of demagogues and dictators. Old Labour may have had some respect for the niceties of the political arguments that new Labour prefers to ignore.

Clearly, there are circumstances in which referendums are appropriate, but we have only to observe how, in our lifetime, people such as Pinochet and Ceausescu have used referendums to assert their own views. All too often we become aware that a referendum has been called by the people who think that it will help to assert their side of the argument.

The proposed referendum is clearly an abuse of the procedure for referendums. It asks the Scottish and Welsh peoples to vote blind, without knowing the full consequences of their decision. Our opposition to the Bill involves no disrespect to the Scottish people or the Welsh people. We will have to respect the result of the referendum, although that will take some degree of interpretation, in view of the way in which the Government have attempted to fix the result in advance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I call Mr. Howard.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that the Chair has responsibilities to the minority parties in the House? The Chair recognises the political situation in Scotland and Wales. Is it not extraordinary that, even in a guillotined Third Reading, no speaker from the Scottish National party or Plaid Cymru has been called in the debate? Might that just make the case for the Scottish and Welsh Parliaments that we are discussing?

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I point out that the Scottish and Welsh nationalist parties voted for the guillotine, so they have got their come-uppance?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I shall deal with the first point of order. The selection of speakers is entirely a matter for the Chair. It is not to be criticised in that way.

Mr. Salmond: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Am I correct in believing that the Chair takes into account the position of the minority parties in this House? Furthermore, does not the Chair take cognisance of the political situation in Scotland and Wales? The Scots and the Welsh returned no Member from the Conservative party—the Chair must be aware of these things.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair recognises all the points that the hon. Gentleman has made and always adopts a balanced view of these matters.

9.44 pm

Mr. Howard: The debate that we have just had has been marked by a number of distinguished speeches, however brief the time available for it has been. We heard another speech from the uniquely authoritative standpoint of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), and a distinguished maiden speech by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), who rightly paid a glowing tribute to his predecessor, who is missed by all in the House. The hon. Gentleman gave us an extremely interesting insight into the economy of the Borders constituency that he represents. We look forward to hearing many more such distinguished contributions from him.

The House is now nearing the end of its consideration of the first Bill of this Parliament. It has been a melancholy experience, a chastening example of the tyranny of the large majority, laced with contempt for this House. The time allowed for discussion has been ludicrously inadequate. Debate after debate has been curtailed before the real issues at stake have even begun to be expounded.

In a newspaper article this morning, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) wrote:

> "In all my 47 years in the House of Commons I have never encountered a Government so determined to ride roughshod over its political opponents, its internal critics and the traditions of Parliament. On its very first parliamentary Bill it resorts immediately to the parliamentary bludgeon in a way which flouts every tried and tested convention, every tradition, every principle of parliamentary life. This is not the act of an efficient administration; it is the act of an elective dictatorship."

It is clear that the central question at the heart of the legislation remains unanswered. The fundamental criticism that we have made remains as valid now as when we offered it at the outset. There is no justification for holding these referendums before the relevant legislation has been passed by the House. As the hon. Member for Linlithgow has pointed out, the only valid question to be posed in a referendum would be: "Do you approve of the Scotland Act and Wales Act of 1998?"

We make it absolutely clear that we are not against a referendum on this issue. We would not be opposed to a referendum on the question posed by the hon. Member for Linlithgow. We have no objection in principle to a referendum. But we do object to a referendum that is intended as a pre-emptive strike against proper parliamentary debate. That is the effect of holding a referendum before the legislation has been passed.

Earlier this evening, the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) put a simple question to the Welsh Office Minister. He asked for a concise answer. His question concerned whether the people of Wales should be allowed to express an opinion on whether the Welsh Assembly should have tax-raising powers. All he got from the Minister was prevarication.

[Mr. Howard]

Later on, I put another simple question to the same Minister. I asked him whether he would now do what the Prime Minister so conspicuously failed to do earlier this afternoon—apologise for the misleading information that he gave the House in answer to a question put to him on 14 May by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). The Prime Minister said then:

"Of course the Bill will be published in time for the referendum, because the referendum will take place on those proposals".—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 64.]

We now know that that was quite wrong, yet the Prime Minister was today incapable of saying, "I'm sorry: I got it wrong."

We fear that the Bill is the first legislative step towards the break-up of the United Kingdom, and we fear that the last two days' proceedings in the House will be looked back on as melancholy staging posts on the way to that destination.

Mr. Donald Anderson: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: I am afraid that I have very little time.

If that indeed proves to be the case, the blame that will be attached to the Government on the basis of their responsibility for this measure will be compounded by the shame that will be attributed to them in view of the way in which they have railroaded it through the House.

Later in the current Parliament, we shall see these days as having established a pattern of arrogance and contempt of Parliament, as a hallmark of the new Government. They are days that the Government will come to regret; they are days that the nation will come to regret. That is why we shall vote against the Bill when the debate concludes in 10 minutes' time.

Sir Patrick Cormack: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you draw Madam Speaker's attention to the fact that we shall have had precisely one and a half hours' debate on Third Reading of a major Bill, and that more than half that time has been taken up by Front Benchers? Will you ask Madam Speaker to discuss, in the appropriate quarters, what can be done to try to redress the balance?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Madam Speaker is always well aware of everything that goes on in the House, and I am sure that she will note what the hon. Gentleman has said.

9.51 pm

Mr. McLeish: The debate can, I think, be summed up in three ways, especially in respect of the Conservative Opposition. First, their performance over the past three days has confirmed the wisdom of the electorate in doing the decent thing for the country on 1 May. Secondly, we have seen a remarkable example of the posturing that is going on in connection with the leadership of the Conservative party. Opposition Members have picked up briefs and arrived on the Front Bench, then disappeared just as quickly. Thirdly, we have seen no humility in regard to what happened on 1 May.

Let me ask the Conservative party in opposition to consider the plight of Scotland and Wales in relation to that party. The Scots and the Welsh simply rejected the notion of being represented by any Conservative Members of Parliament. If we needed just one example on which a bit of humility could be hung, that would clearly be it.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McLeish: No. I have not much time, and I want to reply to the points that have been made.

In the final speech from the Opposition Front Bench, many points were made relating to the detailed White Paper and to the debate and discussions that will ensue before the referendum. On Third Reading, many hon. Members—my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers), the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)—have made points that are germane to discussion of that detailed White Paper, and to the subsequent process leading up to the referendum. Let me tell them that we shall not make progress unless we produce a detailed White Paper that addresses the issues that have been raised. In the context of tonight's debate, the Bill is a straightforward piece of legislation. It is important in that it paves the way for referendums in Scotland and Wales, but it does not change the constitution. It follows well-established precedent, and applies common sense. That is not a quality that we have observed in abundance on the Opposition Benches today or yesterday.

The Bill provides for people in Scotland and Wales to be asked whether they support our proposals for a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly. It enables provision to be made by Orders in Council for the conduct of the referendums, and provides for the conduct of the votes. It also includes a prudent measure enabling expenditure to be incurred in preparation for the establishment of a Scottish Parliament or a Welsh Assembly.

As I have said, the Bill is simple and to the point, but at the same time it is important, particularly for the people in Scotland and Wales. When the Bill is enacted, it will set us well on our way down the path, taking, as I said in my concluding remarks on Second Reading, the next step in the unfinished business of establishing a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly.

The Bill will give the people of Scotland and Wales the opportunity to put beyond all doubt their views on our proposals for devolution in those countries. Its passage through the House is an important milestone on the way to modernising government in the United Kingdom.

I have no doubt that the Government will receive resounding support. That will lend our proposals moral authority. It will provide a helpful backdrop against which Parliament will be able to scrutinise the main devolution legislation. That has been a recurrent theme in the two days of debate. The Opposition should have some patience and then we shall have a full and long-term debate on the details of the White Paper.

The Bill has been debated on Second Reading and in Committee. For such a short Bill, of six clauses, it attracted a remarkably large number of amendments—more than 250 in total. Had they all been accepted, we

would have had before us a Bill which, among other things, would have provided for a referendum to be held in Scotland only on a Sunday, on St. Andrew's day, in daylight hours, during a two-day period and—something of a Catch-22—on any day other than a Sunday.

The point about the frivolous nature of some of the amendments has already been well made by other hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace).

However, it is fair to say that many other amendments rightly sought to promote debate on important issues, including in particular the provisions dealing with the franchise and the propositions on which the people in Scotland and Wales are to be consulted. We made every effort to ensure that, despite the attempts to disrupt and delay consideration of the Bill, those issues were given a fair wind, and we have had a constructive debate on the issues that we have discussed.

The House has had ample opportunity to consider the Bill. There is no reason why we should delay giving the people in Scotland and Wales the opportunity to vote on the Government's devolution proposals. The Bill will give them that opportunity. However, I repeat our categorical assurance that the devolution proposals will be set out in White Papers well in advance of the referendums and before the House rises for the summer recess.

Mr. Grieve: One of the justifications for the referendum has been that the people of Scotland and Wales would not have voted in a general election solely on the referendum issue. Will the knock-on effects of the legislation on the people of England be put to them by referendum?

Mr. McLeish: The answer quite simply is no. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] First, the measure primarily affects Scotland and Wales. However, as we have repeated throughout our various debates, hon. Members from every part of the United Kingdom will be able to debate the issues in the House and reflect any concerns that their constituents might have on the matter. We shall provide the detailed White Paper.

The Opposition simply cannot listen. They seek to lecture people in Scotland and Wales, who have decided to have nothing whatever to do with Conservative representation in those countries for the next five years. Surely that should elicit some humility from Conservative Members. It is sad that the first time they oppose a Bill, they fail the first test. If they want to be taken seriously in England, Scotland or Wales, they will have to address the serious issues before the House instead of, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, indulging in game playing. The future of Scotland and Wales, the future of the United Kingdom and the future of the Union are very important. No service has been done by the behaviour of the Conservative Opposition in relation to such important items.

The Bill, which is the first to get to this stage in the parliamentary process under the new Government, will be good for the people of Scotland and Wales, and good for the people in the rest of the United Kingdom. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 339, Noes 148.

Division No. 14] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'ty S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*

Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keebie, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pendry, Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin and
Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion relating to Modernisation of the House of Commons may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

Question agreed to.

Modernisation of the House of Commons

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a Select Committee of fifteen Members be appointed to consider how the practices and procedures of the House should be modernised, and to make recommendations thereon;

That the Committee shall seek to make a first report to the House before the summer adjournment with its initial conclusions on ways in which the procedure for examining legislative proposals could be improved;

That five be the Quorum of the Committee;

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records; to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House; to report from time to time; and to appoint specialist advisers;

That Mr. Joe Ashton, Sir Patrick Cormack, Mr. Huw Edwards, Sir Peter Emery, Mr. Alastair Goodlad, Mr. Mike Hall, Helen Jackson, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Mr. Clive Soley, Rachel Squire, Dr. Phyllis Starkey, Mr. Andrew Stunell, Mrs. Ann Taylor, Mr. Paul Tyler and Mr. Nicholas Winterton be members of the Committee;

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House until the end of the present Parliament.—*[Mrs. Ann Taylor.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Alastair Goodlad (Eddisbury): Madam Speaker—*[Laughter.]* I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When you played in the back row of the Cambridge university scrum, you looked rather different. I did not recognise you with your rugger jersey off.

When the House discussed the subject of the motion, I made it clear that the Opposition welcomed the Government's decision to give priority to discussions on parliamentary procedure. The Leader of the House will remember from our debate two weeks ago that we undertook to offer constructive comment on the Government's proposals in that area.

I begin with the Government's suggestion that the first responsibility of the new Committee should be to produce a report on improving procedures for examining legislative proposals. Clearly that is a helpful subject for the Committee to address, and I hope that we can agree that all Members should seek to improve the quality of legislation—*[Interruption.]*—even those who seek to conduct their discussions in the House from a sedentary position.

The wording of the motion, however, is somewhat imprecise, implying that the new Committee will need to report on every aspect of the content, drafting and debating of legislation. If that is indeed what the right hon. Lady has in mind, I fear that the Committee might be in danger of becoming bogged down in consideration of aspects of the legislative process in which the House would think that there was no need for change.

In discharging its responsibilities, it is important that the new Committee should have the benefit of proper evidence and specialist advice, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) will be in his place. The new Committee should have the powers listed in the motion.

I am glad that we are making speedy progress in establishing this Committee, not least because the House will be aware that the context for our discussions on the new Committee has changed rather since our amicable debate two weeks ago. It has become clear that to the Government, modernisation may mean changes to the

[Mr. Alastair Goodlad]

House's procedures in the interests of government. I know that the hon. Member for Bolsover does not regard the interests of government as being his.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Do not go so fast.

Mr. Goodlad: Am I going too fast for the hon. Gentleman?

It has become clear that to the Government, modernisation may mean changes to the House's procedures in the interests of government and the small, secretive and unelected group of political appointees at their heart, rather than the interests of this House and our constituents. *[Interruption.]* Our constituents are far from the mind of the Secretary of State for Scotland, who is growling from a sedentary position. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Perhaps he was not growling—perhaps his tummy was rumbling. I would almost prefer not to think about it, and I hope we shall not be hearing it again.

I remind the Leader of the House of her words in our debate two weeks ago. She said:

"We need to consider what alternatives there might be to the guillotine imposed by the Government with a majority and the voluntary understandings that have been tried in the past. Sometimes they have worked, sometimes not, but there is scope to see what other mechanisms could be available to achieve better planning of legislation."—[*Official Report*, 22 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 907.]

I could not have put it better myself. Those words have additional resonance given her decision earlier this week to guillotine the debate before the commencement of the Committee stage of a major constitutional Bill, leaving grossly inadequate time for debate while the usual channels were excluded from the normal negotiations.

The Leader of the House also will be aware that the House has been concerned at the lack of consultation on important changes to the format of Prime Minister's Question Time and at the habit of Ministers of making policy announcements outside this House. The number of political appointments made by the new Government—clearly a surprise to the Lobby fodder—also has direct implications for the work of this House, but has not been debated by this House. The Lobby fodder perhaps do not wish to participate in debates in this House. They will not be allowed to, and one wonders why they came here. Despite their reluctance to engage in debate, they will, no doubt, be accepting the remuneration due to them.

I hope that the Leader of the House will not succumb to any temptation or further pressure from her ministerial colleagues to use the new Committee as a means for the Government to entrench the abuses of their large majority. She has got off to a start in her relationships with this House which varies in the perceptions of hon. Members and outside observers between indifferent, disastrous and catastrophic. Her behaviour and that of the Government over the deliberations before us will be carefully studied.

10.24 pm

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): I welcome the setting up of the Select Committee and I hope that it will consider not only minor adjustments to our procedures but the whole way in which we operate. Our Prime Minister has promised to have a radical Government. He can start by being radical in the way in which he decides to change the House itself. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is determined that that is the route that she will take.

We are overburdened with business here and do things in terms of legislation that we simply should not be doing; they should be done at another level of government altogether and in the most appropriate area in terms of where they impinge on the public. We have started that process with devolution.

Everyone thinks about devolution for Scotland and Wales in terms of what it will do for those countries, but in fact it will benefit Parliament, because we will free up time that is currently taken up with legislating on Scottish and Welsh matters and we will be able to devote that time to giving proper scrutiny to other matters. That is a good start, but it is only a start: we must also look at how we devolve power elsewhere in our society so that we begin to ensure that we free this place to give proper scrutiny to government.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) made an interesting speech a fortnight ago, but he suggested that, when we modernise, changing the forms and the style will not much matter, and I disagree with that. If we are to have a modern, efficient Parliament that works democratically, we must get rid of many of the symbols of an 18th-century Parliament that are well out of date and make us look quaint and so old-fashioned that it is almost unbelievable.

Many of the electorate think that much of what we do is absurd, and we must consider that. I am sorry to say it with the Serjeant at Arms sitting here, but we must get rid of the uniforms, the swords and the wigs, and change the way in which we appear to the public, our electorate.

I have heard people say that our strange customs make us a good tourist attraction, but that is not what I was elected for, however attractive I might be; I was elected to represent my constituents and do the best possible job for them, scrutinising the Government of the day—of whichever party they are formed—and ensuring that we do so efficiently. We cannot do that in a Parliament with the current style, and that is the first thing that we must change.

The very large majority at present has made the way in which we vote seem even more absurd than it did in the past, when numbers were fairly equal on either side. Going through the Lobby these days is a long-drawn-out and unnecessary process. We should devise a system of electronic voting to ensure that we can vote quickly and efficiently, with the votes and the outcome seen straight away, and we do not take half an hour of our time doing it.

We should consider proxy voting. I hope that we never return to the days of ambulances parked outside in New Palace yard with people lying in them while someone nods them through to vote. Their votes should be recorded without their having to be present.

Most of my new hon. Friends are accustomed to working in an environment with an office, secretaries and computers that are connected to the Internet. Here, some of them are still waiting to get an office. It is absurd.

I live in Hamilton, which has a population of 60,000. It was cabled in six months by a company that dug up the roads and laid the cables. People who want cable can have it their homes. It will take 10 years to complete the

cabling of this building and its outbuildings and ensure that every Member who wishes it has access to the increasing number of electronic devices that should be available to a Member who wishes to do his job efficiently.

We have a Government who want us to think the unthinkable. It is time that we thought the unthinkable about this place; it is time that we moved somewhere else. It is time that we built a modern, efficient, new Parliament outside London altogether so that we can operate, and represent our constituents, properly in a modern democratic manner.

10.30 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) for his reference to my previous speech, but he may have slightly misunderstood. I did not say that there was not a good case for removing some of the antiquity of this place that gets in the way of making it a businesslike assembly. However, that should not be our main, or only, objective. Many things that need to be done to this place are nothing to do with wigs and swords. He instanced the way in which we vote, which is antique to an extreme. There is no reason why we could not still go through Division Lobbies, but with swipe cards to make the operation much speedier. As a Government Back Bencher, he will agree that having the opportunity to pin a Minister against the wall regularly, in a place where there are no civil servants to protect him, is very useful.

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the obsession with wigs and swords might become a distraction? Doing away with such things might become a compensation for the lack of real radicalism. It might be better to stay with the wigs and swords, and make some radical changes to the way in which we work.

Mr. Tyler: I have some sympathy with that view. If the new Committee is merely going to modernise the dress of the servants of the House, it will be a terrible wasted opportunity. I am sure that that will not be the case. The Leader of the House and other members of the Government have shown that they have much more serious matters in hand.

It is equally important that we move by evolution and consultation, with special attention to Parliament's role as the scrutineer of the Executive. I think that Labour Members will agree that if all that we are asked to do is to speed Government business, we will fail in the real duty of Parliament, which is to ensure that the Government's business is handled better than it would have been if Parliament had not been sitting. It is a question not only of the speed of the operation but of the quality of the product.

I shall not again cover all the issues that were raised in the debate a fortnight ago, but we have not yet addressed sufficiently the anxieties of Back Benchers of all parties, especially on initiation of debates in respect of motions and private Members' Bills. Under all Governments in recent years, the Executive have had far too much influence over timing and over the extent to which such business has been taken seriously.

My principal concern is to make sure that the very proper priority that has been given to the Committee of dealing with legislation does not lead to neglect of the fact that Parliament has other important concerns.

With the help of the Library—it took about five minutes; it is amazing what it can produce—I compared the figures for the general election of 1951 with those for 1 May this year. In 1951, 96.8 per cent. of those who voted, voted for the duopoly. They voted either Conservative or Labour. A vast majority—79.2 per cent.—of the total electorate, voted for one or other of those parties. There was a legitimate two-party system in operation in the country, and it was represented here by the opposing banks of Members who sat on either side of the House.

On 1 May 1997, 73.9 per cent. of the electorate voted for the two-party system duopoly.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Of those who voted.

Mr. Tyler: My hon. Friend is right; it was 73.9 per cent. of those who voted. Only 52.8 per cent. of those who were entitled to vote voted for a two-party system. In that sense, this place is now an anachronism. It institutes a duopoly of Government and Opposition, which is not the reality out in the real world.

Many hon. Members from all parties have come to this place with considerable and long experience in local government. No local government would operate on the basis of automatic confrontation.

We have seen in the past 48 hours what absurdity automatic opposition leads us into. We spent almost four and a half hours debating a motion on whether we could find more time to debate the substance of the issue. The statement and vote on the timetable motion took up so much time that four and a half hours was taken out of the real business of scrutinising the Government's legislation. All hon. Members should be concerned about that.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The hon. Gentleman will know that in most local authorities there is provision for voting by show of hands and that only important votes are recorded. Is he aware that Standing Order No. 40 makes provision for us to vote by standing in our places? Does he agree with the early-day motion that will appear on the Order Paper tomorrow, which urges the greater use of that provision, especially when there is a series of votes in one evening, and that we should record the important votes, which would be the first ones?

Mr. Tyler: There are two major problems with that. First, if all Labour Members were to attempt to stand in their places, it would be self-evidently impossible to find such places. So the hon. Gentleman can recognise that there are difficulties. Secondly, our constituents are entitled to know how we have voted. It is patently obvious that we could not record our vote in person if we voted by standing in our places. Nevertheless, I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that there may be ways in which, in certain circumstances, we could speed up the voting procedure and enable more issues to be put to the vote.

Mr. Flynn *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: I will not give way again because other hon. Members want to speak.

[Mr. Tyler]

There are other ways in which the voting procedure could be considerably accelerated. The Procedure Committee considered them. It is absurd that when we have a sequence of votes we have to wait each time for Tellers to be appointed, Clerks to get to their places and so on. There must be ways of speeding that up.

It is clear that we shall have to reform radically the way in which the House operates. It is not necessary to move our whole Assembly to Glasgow, but if we do not modernise the way in which it operates, if we do not make it a true reflection of what is happening in the country, the centre of gravity in the body politic will move, in terms of devolution, to other parts of the United Kingdom and perhaps to the European Parliament. We will become increasingly irrelevant if we do not make our procedures more relevant to the real life of the wider public.

One issue is of real concern. This House, in contrast to the other place, does not recognise the fact that we no longer have a two-party system. The other place automatically recognises that there are three major parties, in terms of speeches, time, the selection of reasoned amendments and so on. The other place recognises that the third party is the third of three major parties, not simply a larger minority party. We have only one or perhaps two references in our Standing Orders to that. We shall have to look again at the Standing Orders. It is urgent.

Hon. Members old and new, especially those who have had extensive experience of local government, are surprised at the way in which we operate this place—the confrontational jousting match, which we saw again, I am sorry to say, in Prime Minister's questions this afternoon. I accept that improvements have been made, but we are still seeing absurd confrontation, often where confrontation does not exist. It is largely a bit of play-acting. It is the Punch and Judy show. That may be of great interest to the Dutch and American television audiences, although they may get rather bored with half an hour—it is long for any cabaret—but it does not do justice to the real function of Parliament.

Those who have come here from local government will also recognise that the potential true value of Committees in this place is not met. I hope that we will also be able to consider that. In particular, I hope that the Select Committees will be given a greater role in the pre-legislative development of ideas. I know that many hon. Members on both sides of the House have done detailed work on that. I know that the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) is particularly anxious that that should happen.

All too often we display to the public a confrontational duopoly, but they are looking for true pluralism in their politics. The Prime Minister has given a lead in this respect, but soon we will want to see actions rather than words to ensure that that commitment was not just one given for the benefit of the general election. It must be put into practice after that election success.

10.39 pm

Mr. Joe Ashton (Bassetlaw): I followed with great interest the remarks by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), but, once again, he is making a push for his party. Confrontation and careerism bedevil the House.

Let us be honest. Things get bogged down in Committee because that is the place to make a reputation by tabling 1,000 amendments. I have spent nearly 30 long weary years in the House at night, so I will not detain it for too long now. We have all been through this before. Individual ambition and careerism will demand that certain hon. Members will table 50 amendments. The Government Whips will say to their boys, "Stay quiet. Fill the crossword in, do your mail or whatever you like." After two or three weeks, everyone gets fed up and the word goes round the Whips, "They'll let us have the Bill a week on Tuesday morning if you don't say anything and just nod it through."

The Opposition educate the Government. One can see the civil servants' ears prick up when an Opposition Member moves a probing amendment and asks whether something means X or Y. That Member reveals a dual meaning behind a phrase in a Bill and argues that it would not stand up in court. The civil servants then tell Ministers that the Opposition are right, and they then table about 125 Government amendments on Report to correct mistakes that should have been sorted out when the Bill was read the First time.

Surely we could get together and sort out such problems well before a Bill begins its proceedings. That is just not done because of the careerist ambitions of younger Members in particular. There is nothing wrong with that. It is the ladder or the limelight. One can become an instant media star on television by showing off, being sent off or acting the goat. Alternatively, Members can climb the ladder like Mrs. Thatcher—no one had ever heard of her until she got into the Cabinet—and hope to get a Cabinet job. That is the nature of politics.

Surely with our majority we could avoid such confrontation for the next four years. The hon. Member for North Cornwall spoke about voting. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and I were in the Whips Office when the Labour party started off with a majority of one in 1974 and finished up with a minority of 17. The Whips Office killed six people—I say that with deep sympathy. Some of them had to have their operations at 10 o'clock in the morning and come in here to vote at 10 o'clock at night. Others had to postpone their operations until the recess. Alex Wilson, Millie Miller and Frank Hatton all died because of that. Alex Lyon, the husband of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short), died years afterwards as a result of the traumas that went on then.

It was a wonderful macho time. We actually enjoyed not knowing what the vote would be until 10 o'clock at night. It was better than any cliff-hanger football match or whatever. It certainly did not represent government. For all we talked about getting rid of those procedures, we never did. Helene Hayman had a baby and came in, and I remember the headline in the *Daily Mail*, which ran, "Government hangs by a nappy pin". That was absolutely true. Perhaps people would like the House to stagger

along like that, but it is certainly not government. I wrote a play about it, but no one believed it because it was such black farce.

We used to have a bog trotter. When the Division bell rang, we had a top and bottom bog trotter whose job it was to run around all the toilets to see if anyone was locked in. We had to look under the door for feet and, if seen, we looked over the top. If that person was one of theirs we left him, if it was one of ours, we got him out—if necessary with a screwdriver to unlock the door from the outside. That was the sort of nonsense that occurred when the House divided.

I remember the famous case of Leslie Spriggs, the then Member for St. Helens. We had a tied vote and he was brought to the House in an ambulance having suffered a severe heart attack. The two Whips went out to look in the ambulance and there was Leslie Spriggs laid there as though he was dead. I believe that John Stradling Thomas said to Joe Harper, "How do we know that he is alive?" So he leaned forward, turned the knob on the heart machine, the green light went around, and he said, "There, you've lost—it's 311." That is an absolutely true story. It is the sort of nonsense that used to happen. No one believes it, but it is true.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) regularly used to have a row with the Speaker at about 3.30 pm. I used to hold his shoulders down, saying, "Don't get expelled, you're the majority." It was unbelievable, especially compared with the huge majority that we have in this Parliament. My hon. Friend made the best suggestion when he said that there should be three counters at the end of the Chamber so that we could get through the vote 50 per cent. faster. That could be done simply, without involving major changes.

The Order Paper is a disgrace. If it were the programme for a football match or even an amateur dramatic production, it would say, "The leading players at 3.30 pm will be Mr. Blair, answering questions, with Mr. Howard replying for the Opposition. There will then be a ten-minute Bill", and so on. It would explain what was happening. People in the Public Gallery are bewildered by the Order Paper. They do not have a clue what is going on. There is not even a commentator on television like Freddie Truman or Brian Johnston at a cricket match, who could explain what is happening—for example, "This man has been called by the Speaker because he is chairman of the Anglo-Middle East group." He could give the background.

When Parliament was first broadcast, for the first three days the BBC broadcast everything that came through the loudspeakers. It was libellous, it was unbelievably crude, but it was hilarious. The BBC panicked and said, "Somebody will sue us for libel. If it is in *Hansard* it is okay, but if it is not in *Hansard* we will be done for libel." So the BBC stopped broadcasting everything; now, it jams the broadcast so all people hear is, "Hear, hear, hear." It is terrified of being sued for libel.

The Chamber sounds like animals in a zoo, but for the people in the arena who can hear, it is often witty and sometimes caustic and destructive of careers—but that is politics. It is a rough old trade. We have to find some way of getting that across so that the public can get a taste of what is happening without it denigrating Parliament.

The system for Gallery tickets is a farce—hon. Members get two every 18 days. It is a farce to have to go into a ballot for Prime Minister's questions. We could spend a year entering the ballot in the hope of coming within the first six questions, but in fact getting nowhere near the top. Constituents want to know why we do not ask the Prime Minister about such and such a hospital, a factory, a bypass, and so on. We cannot, and we get frustrated. Everybody is bobbing up and down. People want to know why we are jumping up and down, but they are not given any explanation about the Speaker trying to be impartial. Our constituency parties do not understand why we have not been able to ask our questions.

It would be better to have a rota for Prime Minister's questions, like the rota for tickets for the Public Gallery. I could then say that, for example, on 27 June it is my turn for the Prime Minister and try and get my constituents tickets for the Gallery. At least the constituency would have the opportunity for one of its problems to be put to the Prime Minister, whereas under the present ballot system we could go on trying for ever.

This place was set up 100 years ago for people who lived in London and never went to their constituencies—except when the stink from the River Thames became so bad in August that they went to their country houses and waited for the harvest. They never bothered about their constituencies. Most of them worked in the City or were lawyers who earned a guinea a word at the Old Bailey. They came in at 4.30 with a red bag on their backs which they hung up in the cloakroom. They came to have a drink and relax. Everything was fitted around their day.

It cannot go on. Everybody in the world thinks that we are crazy. They ask, why can we not start at 9 o'clock like they do at the town hall, or at some reasonable time; and why can we not finish at a reasonable time? I feel tremendously sorry for the women who have come into this Parliament. Even we men know the problems of bringing up families. The divorce rate in the House is horrendous, because of the breakdowns in marriages. I can remember when, 20-odd years ago, my wife had a youngster at 20 minutes to 9 and I was here voting on a three-line Whip. I told the Chief Whip and he said, "Good lad—get through the Lobby and don't forget the three-liner tomorrow at half-past 3." It was two days before I got up north to see my youngster. It is crazy. People do not give us medals for doing that—they think that we are absolutely stupid. There is no reason why we could not work normal hours. With modern trains, people could get down here for half-past 10, go home after a vote to see their kids at 10 o'clock at night and then come down again the next day.

Let us face it, the most important thing in politics now is the pressure from our constituents. The members of the parent-teacher association really believe that their Member of Parliament meeting them is more important than his speaking on an amendment to the Budget. Whether we like it or not, that is what they think. The public and the voters will call the tune and, if we do not respond to them, we shall see other elections in which the turnout goes down to 65 per cent., 60 per cent., or 58 per cent. as it was in the American elections when Bill Clinton was elected. At the end of the century, we have to grasp the nettle: change is going to come and we had better make a start on it.

10.50 pm

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate on the reform of

[Mr. Mark Oaten]

the House of Commons. It is important that as a new Member I have been given this chance to express some of the views shared by many new Members coming into the Chamber.

Many of us are quite astounded by some of the things that we have discovered since coming here and we are now learning to get to grips with them. Although it may appear arrogant for a new Member, so early in his parliamentary career, to want to make suggestions about reform, it is important that new Members should have a say in some of the procedures to be considered by the Committee. It is important that new people, seeing all this afresh, can express their views. Of course, we must also respect those individuals who have been in this place for many years and who are aware of the traditions and know far more than I do about the need for reform in certain areas.

One of those traditions is that in a maiden speech it is normal for the new Member to praise his or her predecessor. Some hon. Members on both sides might recognise that, as the new Member of Parliament for Winchester, that tradition presents me with a slight dilemma. To praise my predecessor might be perceived as insulting him, because it is clear that he has yet to admit that he is my predecessor. What should a new Member do in these circumstances? I can certainly say that the former Member of Parliament for Winchester is an individual who never gives up. In his time as a Health Minister, he brought a great deal of intellectual debate to the Conservative party; and he should be credited for having helped the Conservative Government to stabilise their health policy during the past couple of years.

When elected, as I was, by a majority of only two, one starts to realise the importance of democracy and of the tradition of voting. I am amazed by the number of people who have come up to me in the past month and laid claim to those two votes. Many of the police in the House have told me of a relative of theirs living in Winchester, someone who organised a postal vote, or someone who dashed to the polling station just before 10 o'clock. I go to great lengths to inform them that I know where those two votes came from: they are obviously the votes of myself and my wife, so we are responsible for my election.

The message for hon. Members in that tale is the importance of living in one's constituency. I am delighted to be able to live in the constituency of Winchester. It is a constituency with a great history; unfortunately, that history has recently been added to by the longest count ever and the smallest majority in 80 years, but it is nevertheless a most beautiful area in which to live. It stretches to the north to the borders of Basingstoke and vastly to the south, so that one can look out to sea from the outskirts of Portsmouth.

Winchester is a very rural constituency, with a proud tradition, which goes back a long way. I am pleased that I have been called in tonight's debate about the House of Commons because, very many years ago, the Commons did sit in the capital of Wessex, at a time when it was a tradition for Parliament to move around the regions. That would be a radical choice for the Committee to consider, but there may be merit in looking at ways in which we can move some of our debates around the country, to engage the public in what we are doing and to allow them to see our procedures and debates at first hand in their region.

The constituency's history of democracy is strong. That is demonstrated by the fact that in two years' time we shall elect the 700th mayor of Winchester. Most recently, the city has become established as a centre of excellence in education, not only with the college of Winchester but with King Alfred's college, the art college, Peter Symmonds sixth-form college and the agricultural college at Sparsholt, which helps serve the very rural and agricultural tradition of the constituency that I am proud to live in.

Because I love living in Winchester and am proud to live there, I want to spend more time there and less time in the House in the evenings. I do not want to spend my time—as many new Members have had to—voting at 10 o'clock and realising that a 10 o'clock vote means that we end up leaving the House at 11.30, have a mad scramble to catch a cab and must spend the night in a hotel, when I realise, and must explain to my wife, that I could have pressed a button at 10 o'clock and at least got home to see her at the end of the evening.

I believe that many new Members I have spoken to feel very strongly about that issue, and I hope that they have a chance to express those views later. I also hope that new Members will not succumb to this place and in a year's time start saying "Oh well, that is how it works. Let's not move on." Let us remember how we feel now about being obliged to vote late at night and not forget that when—perhaps in a year's time—we have a chance to vote positively to change that.

I ask the Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), please to look very hard at moving the Committee reports through as soon as she possibly can, while the impetus for change is there, and to be radical about it. While preserving the best traditions of this building, let us be radical about the shape and size of the Chamber and the way in which the Lobbies work, and let us be radical and consider as far as we can reforming this building.

I would also ask the Committee, where possible, to look beyond the reform of the Chamber, because part of the public's perception of the Chamber is not only how we work in it and the procedures that we work by, but the role of Members, and the way in which they operate in the Chamber. Radical reform is needed. We need to consider ways to improve our accountability as individuals to the people who elected us, linking ourselves to them. Members should have much more responsibility for reporting back on their appearance in and representation of constituents' views in the Chamber.

To some extent we can achieve that aim by improving the hours that we work and the voting mechanisms, but more radical solutions may be needed. In the run-up to the general election, I gave a clear commitment to the residents of Winchester that I would abide by several principles. One principle was that I would report back much more fully than many of my predecessors in that constituency had done.

In nearly all forms of public life, Parliament has imposed citizens charters on organisations, and it has required companies and public bodies to produce annual reports. However, when it comes to our own role, which is very much in the public eye, our only form of

accountability is to appear at general elections every four or five years. We need to strengthen that accountability. There should be a principle that hon. Members be obliged to produce an annual report to their constituency. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) may laugh, because he would not like what would be in it.

The report would list the way in which the Member voted and the type of meetings that he or she had attended, and it would publicly list the Member's earnings. I believe that that would be a proper form of accountability, much more accessible than constituents having to collect together a year's worth of *Hansard*. The principle of an annual report from Members is very hard for anyone to argue against.

If hon. Members wanted to be much more radical, we would set down standards for the time within which we answer letters. We require many Government Departments to do that, so why should we be different? If we wanted to be radical, we would set down standards for the number of surgeries that hon. Members must hold and for the number of times that they should be seen in their constituencies. Why should hon. Members object to that suggestion? If they want to be good Members of Parliament, they should sign up to it.

Is it not interesting that Conservative Members choose to ridicule such ideas? Perhaps they should note the result of the general election and realise that if they had introduced such policies, they may not have lost so many seats.

I ask the Leader of the House to consider these broader principles, to examine the role of Members and to try to improve accountability.

There is a further way in which we could improve the Chamber and our debates. I refer to the length at which hon. Members speak. We must have shorter speeches. I shall take my own advice and draw to a close, but I call on hon. Members to be as radical as they can, while preserving the best traditions of the Chamber.

11 pm

Mr. Hugh Bayley (City of York): It is a great pleasure to congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on a fine and lucid maiden speech. In a debate such as this, which challenges the way in which Parliament usually conducts its business, it was interesting to hear him break with the parliamentary tradition that maiden speeches are non-controversial.

I was particularly interested to hear a Liberal Democrat Member singing the praises of the first-past-the-post electoral system, but I understand why, with a two-vote majority, the hon. Gentleman does that. I hope that he will come over to my way of thinking and back electoral reform when the House gets round to discussing that subject.

The hon. Gentleman dealt skilfully with the tricky matter of paying tribute to Gerry Malone, his predecessor, to whom many hon. Members on both sides of the House would wish to pay tribute.

I have one piece of advice for the hon. Gentleman. He indeed secured a two-vote majority in Winchester, but those were not his vote and his wife's. Those were the votes of two Tory party members who decided that Winchester was so safe for the Tory party that they used their votes in their holiday home constituency in Scotland to try to retain a Scottish seat for the Conservatives.

I would not go so far as to describe the House as a house of ill repute, but it has a low reputation in the minds of many members of the public. There is an onus on us in a new Parliament to reorganise our affairs in a way that gives the House greater respect among those who vote for us and send us here to represent them.

We could do a great deal to make the House and the Palace more welcoming to the public. I once had a party of disabled visitors coming to see me in the House. I wanted to know how they could get access to the Central Lobby, and the Serjeant at Arms suggested a route that involved using the lift round the back of the post office and passages that led through to the Central Lobby. The passages that I was advised to use were too narrow for an electric wheelchair to go through. It is intolerable that the House should exclude people with disabilities from seeing what goes on and from lobbying Members of Parliament.

There are no refreshment facilities for the public who come to the House. We need an overflow Gallery. Naturally, the Strangers Gallery is not full at this time of night, but during Question Time it is, and with the television link, there could easily be a small cinema or theatre so that people who do not get into Gallery but who come to London to find out what happens in the House of Commons could listen to debates. It could be used in the morning to put on educational shows for schoolchildren and other visitors to the House to explain how Parliament works.

When I was first elected, I told myself that I would never get involved in debates about parliamentary procedure. My constituents ask me to do something about the local hospital, about unemployment, about the school that their child goes to and so on, but no one has come up to me and said, "And another thing, Mr. Bayley—there is a little parliamentary procedure that you ought to change." However, having been here for a short time—five years—I think that it is imperative for us to modernise the House so that we can more effectively do the job that we should be doing for our constituents. Page 115 of "Erskine May" deals with contempts, one of which is long overdue for abolition:

> "Strangers have been punished for contempt for disorderly conduct . . . for refusing to stop taking notes of proceedings when requested to do so by an officer of the House."

This came to my attention because one of my constituents was told to stop taking notes. He was sitting in the Strangers Gallery during an esoteric debate on a Friday morning about the Medicines Information Bill, brought in by my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice). There was virtually no one in the Chamber or the Gallery at the time, and because my constituent had a particular interest in the pharmaceutical industry he was following the debate and taking notes of what was said. He was told to put his pen and notepad away because that was a contempt of the House.

What an idiotic way to carry on. If we want to restore our reputation in the eyes of the public, we should encourage them to come in and understand what we are doing. That naturally involves following our debates. Nowadays it is possible, after all, to switch on cable television and take notes of our debates from the comfort of one's own home. Why, then, do we regard note-taking as a contempt of Parliament? It is indicative of the sort of barriers that this place builds between the institution and the public whom we should be serving.

[Mr. Hugh Bayley]

I hope that the new Committee, as well as looking at procedures of the House and its Committees, will look at how we relate to the public.

This House must do more in future to set a good example. I had to make a special request that the stationery cupboard in Norman Shaw North be stocked with recycled notepaper. I find it extraordinary that we still print stationery on unrecycled notepaper. Why do we?

Today the Government launched a good initiative to encourage people to cycle to work. As it happens, I cycle from my flat to the House of Commons every day. Because I come down Millbank I used to cut in through Chancellor's Gate. It has now been closed, so I cut in through the new entrance, the gates at the House of Lords end of the Palace. It is a wonderful new entrance which has been beautifully cobbled. It is very convenient for cars, but it is very bumpy for those riding bicycles. No one thought of putting through a small path with a smooth surface to encourage people to come here on bikes.

Achieving change of any sort in this place is enormously difficult—

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I cycle as well, but the hon. Gentleman cannot expect everything to be organised for his own convenience. If he cannot take one or two bumps, he should not be in the job.

Mr. Bayley: The hon. Gentleman may enjoy the feeling of a bumpy saddle beneath him when he cycles in. [HON. MEMBERS: "He is a public school boy."] He is indeed. My point is simply that when the House spends money on its own infrastructure, it costs no more to get it right than to get it wrong. It costs no more to serve the needs of pedestrians and cyclists as well as those of motorists. It simply involves thinking through the problem.

What this House desperately needs is a chief executive to manage the place efficiently, so that we do not need to spend months bringing about minor changes such as cycle paths. It took me, as a new Member, three months to find out which Committee was responsible for the note-taking in the Gallery problem, and a further three months for the House to decide that, for an experimental period, it would see whether our parliamentary democracy was robust enough to allow the public to take notes in the Gallery. That is not good enough. If we want change, we need a mechanism that allows the House to achieve it quickly.

11.9 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am pleased to be able to make a brief contribution, and I have been interested to hear the observations that have been made about how the House should be reformed.

I start from the premise that the House is here to represent democracy, and that any modernisation should lead to better legislation. I do not start from the premise that the House is here for the convenience of Members of Parliament, and I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree with me on that point. I say that because I am—I hope—privileged to have been appointed to the Select Committee as one of four representatives of the Conservative party.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), as always, made an entertaining speech and he mentioned certain matters that he considered important. I believe he said that he had been in opposition for 18 years. There are some who say to me, "Mr. Winterton, you have been in the House for nearly 26 years and you have been in opposition for all that time."

I think that the precedents and procedures of the House have been established over the years for a good purpose, and on the basis of experience. Although I want our procedures to be improved and our structures modernised, I want that to happen so that we can achieve more for our constituents, improve democratic accountability and ensure that the legislation that is put on the statute book is better considered by Members of all parties.

I appreciate the concern expressed by the hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley) for his constituents. His constituency is probably as far from London as my constituency of Macclesfield, but I encourage my constituents to visit the House and I encourage schools and other organisations in my constituency to send parties here. Over nearly 26 years, many thousands of my constituents have come here, and apart from one or two criticisms of the way in which we behave at Prime Minister's Question Time there has been very little criticism of the House; it is held in great respect, and the reasons for our structures are appreciated.

I believe, however, that much of the legislation that comes before the House should be considered by a specialist Standing Committee or, when that is inappropriate, by a Select Committee. I have been privileged to serve on Select Committees for nearly 18 years, and for a limited time—until my own party prevented my being reappointed—I chaired the Health Committee. Perhaps I did too good a job on behalf of the people of this country and the House in doing the job that Select Committees are there to do: holding the Government of the day—the Executive of the day—to account. Once the House appoints a Member in that way, whether Conservative, Liberal Democrat or Labour, that Member is there as a servant of the House, not of his or her political party. I believe fervently in that tradition. In my view, the Select Committees of the House represent the most effective way of holding the Executive of the day—now the Labour party, and until a little while ago, the Conservative party—to account.

Much of the legislation that comes before the House—often hastily drafted and often, sadly, as we have experienced in recent hours, considered under a guillotine—would be much easier to consider if it had been considered either by a Select Committee, if it concerned a particular Department of State, or by a Special Standing Committee, which could take evidence and produce papers which could then be published.

One of the unsatisfactory features of Standing Committees is that many organisations, many interest groups in Britain, send members of Standing Committees important documents that are referred to but which cannot be published as part of the Committee's report. That is wrong.

That is one of the areas in which we can do a great deal to help the House pass well considered, well detailed and well thought out legislation. We need the greater use of Special Standing Committees. In addition, Select Committees should consider legislation that falls within the remit of a particular Department of State.

The House has an exciting opportunity to modernise without revolutionising itself—to provide the House with the necessary facilities and structures to do a better job in the interests of democracy. As—I hope—a member of the Committee, I shall seek to do my best to bring that about.

11.15 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke–on–Trent, North): There are a huge number of issues that I should like to raise and many anecdotes that I should like to recount—such as how it took three years as a member of the Finance and Services Committee to get water in the Committee Rooms—but time is short, so I shall be brief.

The most important thing that I want to say is that the Committee has before it the most wonderful opportunity to modernise the way in which we do our work—how we go about our business here in the mother of all democracies. When the Committee considers ways of reforming the procedures of the House, I hope that it will particularly consider the timetabling of business and the hours that we work here.

If we are truly to be a Parliament for all the people, where Members of Parliament are in touch with those whom we represent, we must spend time in our constituencies. That has nothing to do with working a shorter week; it is about being in touch, being able to make visits to organisations, community groups and people so that when we do come here we know what matters to those who elected us.

Above all else, I hope that the President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), who I know will do an excellent job in chairing the Committee, will consider the working week. I hope that the Committee will consider other European Parliaments and how we can so organise our business here that we can encapsulate what we do, perhaps with two, three or four issues going on at the same time, so that in the middle of the week we can concentrate our work in the House and have, say, a fixture list for a full year ahead so that we know when we can be in our constituencies and when we can make commitments to attend meetings. That would be to the benefit of the House. If we can meet that challenge, we shall see the benefits of a Parliament for all the British people.

11.18 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): This has been an interesting and worthwhile debate. We have heard enough from both sides of the House to justify the establishment of a Committee on modernisation of our procedures and the working of the House of Commons. We have had positive contributions from both sides which should be welcomed because they will stand us in good stead when the Committee meets.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), who made his maiden speech this evening. He mentioned that he had a majority of two—I doubt whether he can go anywhere without mentioning that fact—and that he had had the longest count ever. I thought that he would get an offer from my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) to write another play, this time called "A Majority of Two". I can certainly recommend the first contribution that my hon. Friend made: his play about the workings of the Whips Office was, I am afraid, incredibly accurate, as were most of the stories he told this evening. There is scope for change—everyone can agree on that.

When we had the debate on modernisation a couple of weeks ago, I came into the Chamber hoping that we would get a greater attendance than usual for a debate on procedure. I was hoping that instead of the normal five, six, seven or eight attenders, we might have got into the teens. I was absolutely staggered and incredibly pleased to see that at 7.30 pm there were 78 Labour Members in the Chamber when there was no vote and the next day was a recess. Many Opposition Members were also present. That showed just how much interest there is in the changes that need to take place.

It was important that we should move quickly to establish the Committee. I express my gratitude to the right hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad), the shadow Leader of House, and also to the minority parties, for their co-operation in getting the names selected and getting the Committee up and running quickly.

We have suggested that the Committee should have wide terms of reference. All the points that have been raised this evening can be considered by the Committee because of the way in which we have suggested the terms of reference. However, we must look at the priorities for the Committee; that is why I agreed very much with what the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson) said about making sure that we got our priorities right and did not think that by one or two superficial or cosmetic changes we could make any radical reforms to the workings of the House.

We have suggested that the priority should be how we deal with our legislative procedures. I am glad to say that that proposal has been agreed to by Opposition Members. We have had constructive suggestions. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) mentioned Special Standing Committees, which we suggested on several occasions in opposition. I hope that we can suggest such Committees again in government. The whole framework in which we examine legislation must be looked at and I hope that we can come up with some initial conclusions relatively quickly in these vital areas because it is important that the House should change as quickly as possible. The Government want to help, perhaps by having piloting of different procedures if that seems appropriate. We should all work together to achieve that.

The motion gives the Select Committee the usual powers to have a special adviser and things of that kind. I hope that the right hon. Member for Eddisbury, who was somewhat worried about the remit, will acknowledge that given the range of issues that have been raised this evening, we are right to make sure that it is as wide as possible. We should indicate some priorities to the Committee, but I think that the Committee may wish to ask Members of the House for evidence or ideas and at that stage, we shall have to decide what the priorities are.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I did not speak earlier in the debate so that we could get to the end of these proceedings. I have two or three suggestions which should be dealt with. The Committee should look at the possibility, at long last, of providing more time for private Members' Bills. It should also deal with the Order Paper. Many suggestions have been made over many years about changing our antediluvian Order Paper.

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

There is also the question of voting, which is pretty chronic. My hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) made a point on my behalf about deaths. The two minutes that we lose at the beginning of Divisions should also be considered.

If there is any attempt to go to a 9 to 5 parliamentary day, the House should bear this point in mind. What we need is to cut out all the moonlighting. One Member of Parliament should do one job, which means that we can do the thing at a stroke.

Mrs. Taylor: I am not quite so optimistic as my hon. Friend about modernising at a stroke. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton) said, we can at this stage only make a start, but make a start we must.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has come up with some suggestions. Although I would not agree with all of them, it is right that the Committee should consider all such things—certainly private Members' Bills and the Order Paper. As has been said, anybody—especially a new Member or a visitor—is extremely puzzled by the Order Paper. I am sure that more can be done in that area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover has suggested having three desks in the Lobby. He made that suggestion two weeks ago. I understand that it has been tried in the past, but that does not mean that it should not be considered again. When he talks about the House sitting from 9 to 5, in a sense I return to what my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) said. I agree with her that we need a sort of concentrated week so that hon. Members with non-London constituencies can spend guaranteed time outside Westminster being in touch with and representing their constituents. We must ensure that we get the balance right so that we can protect interests there.

I hope that the new Committee will meet as soon as possible, work quickly and look at the four areas that I indicated were our priorities: legislation, accountability of Ministers, best use of Ministers' time and customs and practices. The Government have already announced that they intend to publish a record number of draft Bills. That presents us with extra opportunities to explore possibilities and see how the Bills would work in practice.

Mr. Tyler: I think that the Leader of the House made a slip of the tongue just now, which is very important to correct. I think that she referred to the best use of Ministers' time, but she probably meant the best use of hon. Members' time. That is a very important distinction. Since we are very concerned in this debate not simply to expedite Government business but to improve it, perhaps she would like to correct that impression.

Mrs. Taylor: If I said "Ministers' time" I certainly did not mean it. Ministers have to spend more time in London, so getting to their constituencies is an extra problem. If we concentrate the parliamentary week, we shall allow Ministers—those who are also hon. Members—to do their constituency work as well. However, I was thinking primarily of hon. Members and not Ministers in that context.

There seems to be a great deal of good will towards the whole idea of modernising our procedures. We have a different type of opportunity from any ever before—certainly in all the years that I have been in the House. I therefore hope that the Committee will undertake its task as speedily as possible and ensure that we make this Parliament as efficient and as effective as we possibly can. I am sure—at least, I hope—that the Committee will meet the expectations of the House since there is now more interest in change than ever before. We all have a responsibility to ensure that the change that we adopt is practical, workable and will improve our parliamentary democracy.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That a Select Committee of fifteen Members be appointed to consider how the practices and procedures of the House should be modernised, and to make recommendations thereon;

That the Committee shall seek to make a first report to the House before the summer adjournment with its initial conclusions on ways in which the procedure for examining legislative proposals could be improved;

That five be the Quorum of the Committee;

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records; to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House; to report from time to time; and to appoint specialist advisers;

That Mr. Joe Ashton, Sir Patrick Cormack, Mr. Huw Edwards, Sir Peter Emery, Mr. Alastair Goodlad, Mr. Mike Hall, Helen Jackson, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Mr. Clive Soley, Rachel Squire, Dr. Phyllis Starkey, Mr. Andrew Stunell, Mrs. Ann Taylor, Mr. Paul Tyler and Mr. Nicholas Winterton be members of the Committee;

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House until the end of the present Parliament.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That Mr. Andrew F. Bennett, Mr. Colin Burgon, Mr. Dominic Grieve, Ms Rosemary McKenna, Ms Diana Organ, Mr. William Ross and Mr. David Tredinnick be members of the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

Local Government Finance (Oxfordshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Janet Anderson.]*

11.28 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I am grateful for being granted this debate. It seems appropriate that, as I have just witnessed a debate on the modernisation of the House, my first speech following my maiden speech should take place at this hour. However, as a former hospital junior doctor, I am well used to working at such nocturnal times. I hope to ensure in what follows that the House is not the victim, as the national health service sometimes is, of slowness and errors caused by overtired people working under too much pressure.

It may be argued that the difference between then and now is that, during the long nights in hospitals, I had direct influence over people's welfare, their care and their lives. However, I would argue that in our treatment of the revenue support grant, budget and capping of Oxfordshire county council, we in the House also have the lives and welfare of the people of Oxfordshire in our hands. They rely on the services, especially education and social services, provided by Oxfordshire county council for their care and well-being.

I shall not attempt to parade all the arguments that the county council would use to seek to persuade the Government to redetermine the capping level at the budget already fixed by the county council. Those arguments will be put clearly if—and, I believe, when—the county council decides to appeal against the initial designation by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. With other hon. Members for the county of Oxfordshire, some of whom are in their places tonight, I will support that appeal at the appropriate moment.

I will not seek to make a party political or partisan speech, because the issue does not divide people along party lines in Oxfordshire, since the above-cap budget has all-party support there. Oxfordshire is not the sort of place where politicians are usually shy about disagreeing with opposing politicians. I think especially of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), of the right hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who is the Minister for Employment and Disability Rights, and, of course, of my predecessor, John Patten. I will seek instead to outline why Oxfordshire has an excellent case for its appeal and why there is no reason, with such cross-party consensus locally and in the House tonight to some degree, why the Government—committed as they are to listening and dispensing with blunt instruments—should not agree, on close examination of the detailed case, that the budget set by the county council is right and proper.

In the spirit of constructive opposition that saw the Liberal Democrats vote for the Queen's Speech, I shall quote from the Labour manifesto, although one of the most appealing aspects of the Gracious Speech was that it contained items to be found only in the Liberal Democrat manifesto. The section in the Labour manifesto headed "Good local government" stated:

"Local decision-making should be less constrained by central government, and also more accountable to local people."

That is the first point that I shall address tonight. The manifesto continued:

"Although crude and universal council tax capping should go, we will retain reserve powers to control excessive council tax rises."

I will address that point second. The manifesto also stated:

"Labour is committed to a fair distribution of government grant."

I will conclude briefly on that point.

On the first point about local democracy and accountability, there is a strong argument, put ably by the Labour party in last year's debate:

"The Government are acting against the wishes of the people of Oxfordshire"—

in redetermining the budget at the capping level—

"The people want the opportunity to fund their schools and their social services properly, but they know that the Government will manipulate the figures to ensure that they cannot do that. That is not good enough."

The speaker, appropriately enough, was the hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), who is now the Minister of State, Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The right hon. Member for Oxford, East strongly supported his colleague, and said:

"As my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) said, except in the most exceptional circumstances, it should be up to local people to make that decision, and councillors should be accountable through the local electoral process."

At the time, the right hon. Gentleman was shadow Financial Secretary to the Treasury and charged with showing that his party could be responsible with the public finances, which is a task that I believe he performed well then and which the Labour party seems to have performed well in the election campaign—perhaps too well on occasions for Liberal Democrats. When the right hon. Gentleman was pressed on that subject, later in the debate, he said:

"we intend to review the system for local government support . . . to enable local democratic preferences properly to be expressed and reflected in local budgets, so that local people have the say in determining the level of resources for local services, which are there to meet local needs."—[*Official Report*, 22 May 1996; Vol. 278, c. 359-73.]

I could not have put it better myself.

The fly in the ointment last year was that the above-cap budget was not fully supported by the local Conservative group so it could have been argued that, had there been county council elections, the people would have swept to power a pro-capping local Conservative group.

However, that argument was tested this year, and not only did the Conservative group support the budget—indeed, with the Labour group, the Conservatives actually made the above-cap budget—but the council has just been completely re-elected on a huge turnout, and the new council, meeting after that election, unanimously supported that budget.

[Dr. Evan Harris]

The Labour party scored well in those elections, and its election platform, as stated in its local manifesto, was:

"Labour believes in quality public services financed by fair local taxation. We also believe that power should be exercised at the lowest relevant level and that local people should be free to decide through the ballot box on the level of local service and taxes".

Liberal Democrats support those sentiments. The manifesto continued:

"We deplore the years of successive cuts which Tory Governments have imposed on Oxfordshire services. We welcome the reversal of that trend which will follow the election of a Labour Government, as part of a new constitutional settlement which will change the relationship between local communities, their public services and their elected representatives."

It is just possible that Oxfordshire county council's Labour group, in its reforming zeal, may be slightly ahead of the Government, but I believe that the redetermination decision will present the Government—a Government who hit the ground running, and may merely have stumbled over designating our budget for capping—with the opportunity to pick themselves up and sprint forward towards the land of local democracy and accountability, and towards that new constitutional settlement.

Those may be grand words—

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon) *rose—*

Dr. Harris: I give way to the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown), who was an active member of the Labour group on Oxfordshire county council in former years.

Ms Drown: I thank the hon. Member for allowing me to take part in the debate. I wanted to do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because my constituency borders on Oxfordshire, and some of my constituents work in, and many are affected by, services in Oxfordshire.

My constituents have raised with me—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. In such debates it is customary not to give way unless there has been some prior agreement. I understood that the hon. Lady was simply making a brief intervention. If she is making a speech, that is rather a different matter. Was there a prior agreement?

Dr. Harris: I was warned that the hon. Member for South Swindon might intervene, and I am happy to give way so that she can briefly make the points that she wishes to make, in an intervention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Lady may complete a brief intervention. Then the debate can continue.

Ms Drown: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have three brief points to make.

First, my constituents, too, are affected by what the hon. Member is describing. Secondly, all parties on Oxfordshire county council agree on the need to point out that the county's budget has been slashed by £52 million over the past six years. That may have produced some efficiencies in the past, but it is now causing great pain.

Thirdly, I shall give an example of the sort of thing that is happening in Oxfordshire. The 400 children on the child protection register are not being properly supervised.

The spending level that the county proposes represents a very modest increase. All parties on the council are asking for that degree of flexibility. I support what the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) is saying, and urge the Minister to do all that he can to give Oxfordshire the modest flexibility that it requests.

Dr. Harris: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making those points, which I shall not repeat.

To continue from where I left off, the words that I used may have seemed grand words to describe such a small sum. The difference between the budget that in the view of all groups in Oxfordshire is needed to preserve essential services, and the capped level, amounts to 54p per week on the council tax for a band D property. Indeed, the council tax rise at the capped level—2.4 per cent—will be the lowest rise of all the shire counties.

The £6 million that we are talking about amounts to less than 0.03 per cent. of the public sector borrowing requirement, and a mere 0.008 per cent. of total local authority spending. It is salutary to note that as a percentage of total public spending, the figure amounts to 0.000023 per cent.—approximately one fifth of a millionth of total public spending.

Another point in Labour's manifesto—which swept the Government to power with such a large majority—concerned the need to get rid of crude universal council tax capping and to retain only measures needed to prevent excessive council tax rises. I would agree that Oxfordshire is extreme—it is extreme in that it is the lowest spender per head of all county councils. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt), who is in the Chamber, is a former leader of the Labour group on Oxfordshire county council. No one could describe him as an extremist.

Labour's manifesto also said that the party was committed to a fair distribution of Government grants. Clearly that complex subject has been mastered only by a few distinguished intellectuals with patience and insight, and I include the Minister in that description. That is why the Liberal Democrat group on Oxfordshire county council has chosen a mathematics don to lead its arguments. That will take a lot of time to review, and I urge the Government to listen in the meantime to the views of the local Labour party and the people of Oxfordshire as expressed at the ballot box.

Oxfordshire has been through a lot. The revenue support grant and capping levels have led to more than £51 million of cuts in the past six years, and the capped budget itself followed a decision to cut funding and services needed in Oxfordshire by £12 million—mainly, I am afraid, from social services. That cut is not the action of an irresponsible or extreme, high-spending council. The council has used all its reserves and balances, as the Government would request. The standard spending assessment takes no account of

rurality or of the sparsity of population which, in Oxfordshire, is the worst in the south-east in financial terms—although it is the best for those of us who live there. I stress also that the cap is particularly rigorous in the case of Oxfordshire because it is only 1.3 per cent. above the SSA. It is a fierce cap, as the average for shire counties is 2.4 per cent.

I conclude by quoting the present Minister of State, Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for North–West Durham, who, in the debate last year, referred to the exasperation at the cap imposed on Oxfordshire following a cap that had been imposed the previous year. She said:

"Once again, I have found that the words used one year are not followed up in succeeding years".—[*Official Report*, 22 May 1996; Vol. 278, c. 355.]

She added that the then Secretary of State for the Environment had learnt nothing from the previous year. All we are now asking is that Labour Members do not forget what they said—and, I think, believed—last year.

11.42 pm

Mr. Robert Jackson (Wantage): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on winning the ballot for this debate in which he spoke for our county of Oxfordshire, and I thank him for inviting me to take part briefly in it. I am pleased that he recognises the consistent support that I have given to the county's efforts to spend on locally provided services what local people judge to be both prudent and necessary.

In replying to the debate, the Minister will doubtless tell us that Oxfordshire has to prove that it is different. That is what his civil servants will advise him to say, just as it was their advice to his predecessors. This brief debate is not the occasion for that demonstration, which will have to come when he meets representatives of the county and local Members of Parliament in due course.

I want to make two political points. First, I recognise that the Labour party won the general election in part because it responded to people's quite reasonable resentment at what had become an over-centralised system of Treasury control of local government and its services—particularly education. Everywhere in Oxfordshire and throughout the country, Labour candidates campaigned on the basis that centralised local authority expenditure capping would be abolished and replaced by an efficiency audit to ensure that money raised locally was being properly spent.

The Audit Commission studies show that Oxfordshire is undoubtedly one of the more efficient counties, and the message that our constituents want to be allowed to spend more of their money on local services has come over loud and clear in Oxfordshire.

During the general election campaign, the Labour party tapped into a widespread sense of grievance about those matters. I trust that those of my constituents who succumbed to its blandishments will not find that they have voted simply to exchange grievance for disappointment.

I had hoped that the matter might have been settled in favour of the county before the election. To that end, I took part in various conversations and private meetings with Conservative Ministers, before the shutters came down when the election was announced. It was always my clear impression that Ministers at the time were sympathetic to Oxfordshire's case.

The House, the new Government and the Minister might like to know that I am authorised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), the former Minister for Local Government, Housing and Urban Regeneration, to say that it was his intention, after hearing Oxfordshire's detailed case, to recommend to his colleagues in the previous Government that Oxfordshire be permitted to levy a council tax at a rate above the capping limit. I hope that in his reply the Minister will be able to speak at least as fairly as that.

11.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under–Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on his good fortune in securing this debate and on articulating in a forthright way the concerns of his local county council and his constituents. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) on her brief intervention expressing similar concerns. We have heard, too, a short but useful contribution from the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), who spoke in the equivalent debate a year ago, although I note that he voted in favour of the cap on that occasion.

Mr. Robert Jackson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recall that that was on the basis that the Government were allowing Oxfordshire to make some supplementary borrowing—not an increase in the cap, but some additional borrowing.

Mr. Raynsford: As the hon. Gentleman has acknowledged, the Government did not adjust the cap, and he voted in favour of that cap. Clearly, he has had a further think in the meantime and is advocating a different course. He has told us that the former Minister, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), said that he would have taken a different view this year. That may be; it is interesting how people can change their point of view after the event, and not least after an election defeat. We as a Government, however, must consider the position that we have inherited, and that is not an easy position.

I want to make some general points about the new relationship between central and local government, to which the Government are committed. The Government have a new agenda for Britain's future, and a vision for local government's place in that future.

We want to reinvigorate local government, in ways that encourage increased democracy, with local people having the chance of more of a say in the affairs of their council. We want local government to have increased autonomy, with more freedom for authorities to take their own decisions; increased accountability, with elected representatives being more visibly accountable for their actions; and increased partnership between central and local government and between local authorities and people, businesses and groups in their area. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon alluded to a number of those aspirations and quoted from our election manifesto, to which we are committed.

[Mr. Raynsford]

Within that framework, local authorities have important roles as both commissioners and deliverers of a wide range of local services. Authorities are responsible for assessing service needs for groups and individuals; for balancing priorities; for setting objectives; for procuring delivery and/or providing services directly; and for monitoring quality and standards, reviewing performance and acting on complaints. Those are all important tasks.

We have been busy in the month since the general election. In the Queen's Speech, we announced a major programme of legislation for the first Session, including many Bills affecting local government, on the release of capital receipts, the establishment of a new strategic authority for London and the establishment of regional development agencies throughout England, as well as Bills on education and on crime and disorder and one setting up the welfare-to-work programme.

Only this week we have signed the Council of Europe's charter of local self-government and set out our proposed approach on replacing compulsory competitive tendering with a duty on local authorities to secure best value.

That pace will continue. We shall examine with local government the scope for pilot studies on a range of issues, such as best value, a new approach to regeneration, community planning and partnerships with other agencies, and democratic innovations. We shall also work on the scope of the new duty to promote economic, social and environmental well-being that we intend to place on local authorities, to strengthen their community leadership role and encourage innovation and local partnerships in the delivery of services and development and regeneration projects.

That volume of local government business reflects the importance that we attach to local government. The local government agenda will keep us all very busy over the length of this Parliament and, I hope, beyond it, but we shall also make prompt progress. Our agenda is positive. Our Government want to be judged on our success in improving the quality of life for all people and on the extent to which we have made a difference.

On local government funding, all public expenditure programmes have to be examined rigorously each year, and local government spending, which accounts for a quarter of all public expenditure, is no exception. Decisions on local government spending must take into account not only the pressures on local authorities, but the scope for greater efficiency and effectiveness in local authorities.

We have, of course, inherited this year's local government spending plans, and have given a clear commitment to retain them. Although we are committed to reviewing the local government finance system in future years, for this year at least we must work within the current spending plans.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon mentioned standard spending assessments, as did the hon. Member for Wantage. SSAs are the basis for the distribution of revenue support grant. They are based on measures of spending need that apply to all local authorities, and are discussed with representatives of local government. The SSAs for 1997–98 have been announced. As with total local government spending plans, we have said that they will not be revisited and we do not propose to do so now.

Having said that, we are committed to a fairer distribution of Government grant among authorities, and believe that there is scope for improvement in the arrangements in future years. My colleagues and I will look closely at the SSA system with that aim in mind. We shall listen to local government views on how SSAs might be improved, both for 1998–99 and in the longer term.

If the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon feels that the SSA system does not treat Oxfordshire fairly, I should be happy to examine any proposals that he has for different methods of calculation or other appropriate changes. However, any system of this nature must be universal and any changes would need to apply to all local authorities equally. In making any changes, we will, of course, want to be sure that they will produce a sounder assessment of needs. I should welcome any specific proposals that he may have.

The local government finance settlement for 1997–98 saw the total standard spending assessment for all local authorities increase by £1.1 billion or 2.5 per cent. on 1996–97. Oxfordshire county council's SSA increased by more than £8.7 million, or 2.7 per cent. That is above the average increase for counties, which was 2.1 per cent., and is well above the overall increase for English authorities of 1.5 per cent.

Two important areas—one was mentioned tonight, and the other featured in a recent publication by Oxfordshire county council—are education and fire services. Oxfordshire's education SSA increased by the shire county average of 3.5 per cent., while the fire SSA went up by 6.4 per cent., compared with an average of only 5.5 per cent. The county also did well with a 4.4 per cent. increase in its highways maintenance SSA—while the shire county average showed a fall—and with a 3.9 per cent. increase in the other services SSA, compared with an average increase of only 2.1 per cent. Those figures do not suggest that Oxfordshire has suffered unfairly in relation to other counties in this year's SSA; quite the contrary, if anything.

Dr. Harris *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I have only five minutes in which to complete my reply. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that in a time-limited debate, I cannot give way. If he wishes to make observations, I should be happy to accept them in writing. RSG distribution for the 1997–98 settlement is a closed matter, following approval of the local government finance settlement by the House in February, and it will not be reopened. We must look to the future and build a successful partnership, with local government playing its part.

With regard to capping, we gave clear signals that while we proposed to replace in due course the crude capping system that currently operated, that would have to wait for future years. We said that in the meantime we proposed to follow the intentions of the previous Government for 1997–98—a financial year which, as everyone knows, began almost a month before the general election that returned the Labour Government. All authorities, including Oxfordshire county council, knew that when setting their budgets.

Only three out of the 436 authorities in the country set budgets significantly over their provisional capping limits. Our decision to designate those authorities demonstrates

that we are taking our commitments on spending seriously. Indeed, we have also made it clear that under our plans for replacing the current capping system in future years, we shall retain reserve powers to deal with exceptional cases where unreasonable budgets are set. The hon. Gentleman also alluded to that. So this year all three authorities will be required to reduce their budgets unless they can convince us that they should not.

Under the capping legislation, capping principles apply to classes of authority, and we can consider an individual authority's circumstances only if it budgets over cap. Oxfordshire was permitted to increase its budget by 2.2 per cent., which was the average permitted increase for shire counties. Certainly on the basis of the information that we have seen so far, there is nothing to suggest that Oxfordshire is in a tougher position than other counties that have budgeted within cap. Our proposed cap would still allow the county to increase its budget by £7.35 million compared with 1996-97. We consider that to be reasonable and achievable.

Decisions on priorities in services is a matter for the authority itself. It is not for me to suggest that the authority should make reductions, or where those reductions might be made if the cap is confirmed. Local authorities would understandably object if we sought to dictate exactly how each pound was spent.

At this stage in the capping process, authorities can accept the caps that we have proposed. When that happens, the cap limit is then set by notice and the authority can immediately set a revised lower budget and recalculate its council tax. Sending out new bills will obviously impose an extra administrative burden, and that expense will have to be met from within the authority's revised budget. However, that is a direct result of the authority's decision to breach the provisional cap, and all authorities are aware of the implications of doing so.

When a county council is required to recalculate its council tax, the burden of rebilling will fall on the district councils in the area. However, those billing authorities can recover the costs from the county. In terms of the effect on services, it will be for the authority itself to decide spending priorities within the resources available to it.

Should Oxfordshire wish to challenge its cap—from what the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon said, I suspect that we shall receive representations from the authority and hon. Members who have connections with the county—it has 28 days from the date of designation, that is, until 18 June, to propose an alternative amount, together with its reasons for doing so. As well as submitting its written case, the authority will have an opportunity to meet me or one of my colleagues to put its case directly to us. We shall be open to such representations and we shall consider them carefully, as we shall the points that have been made in tonight's debate. We shall then consider all the relevant points before reaching our decision.

Final caps will be set out in—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at two minutes to Twelve midnight.

House of Commons

Thursday 5 June 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Inward Investment

1. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to encourage inward investment. [655]

14. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to encourage inward investment into the United Kingdom. [668]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mrs. Barbara Roche): Inward investment is important not only for the jobs that it brings to Britain, but for the benefit that it brings to local economies.

The Department's invest in Britain bureau will promote the United Kingdom for mobile international investment to ensure that we are the number one location in Europe for investment from countries such as Japan, the United States and Korea. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade was able to contribute personally to those efforts when she visited Japan last week.

Mr. Waterson: I warmly welcome the hon. Lady to her new responsibilities at the Dispatch Box. Did she see the report of *The Economist* intelligence unit a few days ago which concluded that Britain had the second most favourable business environment in the world, second only to Hong Kong? Does she consider that our chances of reaching the No. 1 slot in that league table will be enhanced by having the national minimum wage, the windfall tax and signing the social chapter?

Mrs. Roche: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind and courteous words. We want to promote Britain as the investment centre of the world. To do that, we need a highly skilled and highly motivated work force. All the measures that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned will give us just that.

Mr. Fabricant: I, too, welcome the hon. Lady to the Dispatch Box. As she will be aware, about 18 per cent. of manufacturing arises from inward investment in this country. What is her view of the recent Treasury projection—

Mr. Mackinlay: The Tories are bunching up for the camera to try to make it look as though there are more of them.

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fabricant: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

What is the Minister's view of the recent Treasury projection that a million people will be thrown on the dole if the minimum wage is set around £4? Does she agree with that projection? A simple yes or no will do.

Mrs. Roche: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words.

The Government have always made it clear that the minimum wage would be set at a level the country can afford, that the Low Pay Commission will consult employers as well as employees and that the employers' side of the discussions will be made up of small and large businesses. To be competitive in the modern world, we need a motivated work force. We aim to ensure that we have just that.

Mr. Gunnell: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her place on the Front Bench—indeed, I congratulate the whole team. We have a high-quality team answering trade and industry questions.

Does my hon. Friend agree that having a Government who are united on Europe will help us in terms of inward investment? Have not the divisions in the Tory party over Europe made it much more difficult to attract inward investors to Britain? Is it not good news for inward investment that we now have a Labour Government who are convinced that they will put Britain back at the heart of Europe?

Mrs. Roche: I thank my hon. Friend, and I agree with him. One reason why we attract inward investment to this country is our membership of the European Union and the influence that we can bring to bear. The divisions in the last Administration, who put party before country, were extremely unhelpful to our inward investment. The new Government's first commitment will be to the country, not the party.

Dr. Godman: May I point out to my hon. Friend that there is a long history of inward investment in my constituency? It was the late Hector McNeil, Labour Member for Greenock, who persuaded IBM to come to Spango valley more than 40 years ago. Will my hon. Friend ensure that, whenever possible, those from abroad who are seeking to invest in our constituencies set up research and development centres, which are so important? We do not want just assembly units.

Mrs. Roche: I absolutely agree. Inward investment is important and needs to be taken seriously because of its benefits to local industries and economies. That is why this Government will actively encourage supply chains, working with local authorities and others to get the very best for our home-grown industries from the inward investment that we hope to attract.

Monopolies and Mergers Policy

2. **Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the guiding principles that the Government will follow in superintending monopolies and mergers policy. [656]

The President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The Government are committed to effective and fair competition. In exercising my statutory responsibilities, I shall consider each case on its merits. My policy will be to make merger references primarily on competition grounds.

On the wider question of reform, the Government will be introducing a new competition Bill this autumn, adopting a tough prohibitive approach to deter anti-competitive practices and abuse of market power.

Mr. Taylor: I congratulate the President of the Board of Trade on her appointment. May I ask her to explain why the Government have already done two U-turns—one on the proposal to merge the Office of Fair Trading with the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, the other on the burden of proof in takeover cases? She has been quoted as saying—she has said it again today—that competition grounds will be at the heart of her policy. Will she confirm that, and remark its fidelity to the proposals first set out by Lord Tebbit?

Mrs. Beckett: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks. If I recall correctly, it has been the practice of successive Governments of all political shades for 40 years or so to have competition policy handled in the way that I have described.

As for two U-turns, either the hon. Gentleman's researchers have not been assiduous enough, or he has not read our documents with sufficient care. I can assure him that no U-turn is involved. If he reads the policy document that we issued long before the election, he will discover that while these issues were identified as the subject of people's concern, and while proposals had been made to effect the sort of changes described, there was no commitment to them whatever. I can tell the hon. Gentleman in the utmost confidence that Lord Borrie's view of the proposals chimes absolutely with my own.

Mr. Doran: I welcome my right hon. Friend most warmly to her new position. I know that she would not want to comment on individual cases, but is she aware of the proposed merger between Grampian Television and Scottish Television—a proposal that is opposed by most sections of opinion in the north of Scotland? When considering new legislation, can she assure me that current grounds for referral to the MMC will not be weakened in any way?

Mrs. Beckett: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. He is right to say that I cannot comment on individual cases. I hope, however, that it will already be apparent—certainly from what we have said about the new legislation that we intend to produce—that, far from weakening the approach to competition issues, we intend substantially to strengthen the position adopted by the previous Government.

Mr. Harvey: I, too, congratulate the right hon. Lady on her appointment, and I welcome the flexibility that she is displaying on this matter. If competition is to remain the central consideration, however, does she intend to offer further guidance on any other factors to which she will attach priority as she considers each and every case on its merits? Does she not see a danger of merger mania taking off again as companies try her on to find out what is guiding her in these deliberations?

Mrs. Beckett: I see no evidence that that will happen, although I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. I have sought to head off any attempts to discern policy by testing me out by making the simple, clear statement to a business audience yesterday that, on competition policy as on other things, there is no need for people to waste their time on close textual analysis: I say what I mean and I mean what I say.

European Union

3. **Dr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures Her Majesty's Government intend to take to improve (a) the competitiveness and (b) the trading position of British companies within the European Union. [657]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government will work in partnership with business to improve the country's competitiveness and trading position. For instance, during our presidency of the European Union next year we intend to complete the single market. That will be particularly important in areas such as telecommunications, air travel and financial services, where there are great opportunities for British business which will stimulate competition and give the customer a better deal. We will also take steps to improve the effectiveness of Government support for exporters.

Dr. Williams: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her appointment. Does she accept that the increase in the value of the pound—16.5 per cent. since last August, taking us back almost to pre-black-Wednesday levels—poses a threat to our competitiveness?

Mrs. Beckett: As my hon. Friend knows, concern has been expressed about some of those issues, but he also knows that the root of competitiveness and long-term prosperity for Britain is the cultivation of economic stability. Lack of economic stability was a sharp feature of the previous Government's record. We believe that actions taken recently by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will contribute to stability, which in turn will contribute to an overall competitive position—and that includes exchange rate issues.

Mr. Wilkinson: In greeting the right hon. Lady in her new position at the Dispatch Box, may I ask her how the adoption of the social chapter, the imposition on British companies of the provisions of an employment chapter from Brussels, and the idea that Brussels should have the power to impose sanctions on British companies which do not obey the diktats of Brussels, can possibly improve the competitiveness of British companies in the European Union and world markets and improve employment possibilities in British firms?

Mrs. Beckett: As I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is well aware, we very much take the view that future

competitiveness and future success for Britain lie in encouraging quality. The Government's view is that the attitude that we adopt to issues such as the social chapter and to any proposals for an employment chapter will be governed by what we believe to be in the interests of Britain's competitiveness. We believe that quality and skills are very much at the heart of that.

Former Coal Mining Areas

4. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the President of the Board ofTrade what measures she has for creating jobs in ex–coalfield areas with excessively high unemployment; and if she will make a statement. [658]

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. John Battle): The legacy of pit closures has scarred whole communities and much work still needs to be done because unemployment is still unacceptably high in those communities. That should not be forgotten as we pull together programmes and policies to assist.

Mr. Skinner: I welcome my hon. Friend to his new job. When he tours the coalfields—Bolsover and many others—as I expect he will, he will not only see the legacy of 18 years of Tory industrial policy: he will see the social fabric of once-proud mining communities almost broken down. Does he agree that the slap-happy policies of market forces will not solve those problems and find work for those communities? Intervention and planning are needed, not only by the Department of Trade and Industry but by others in the Government, to provide much-needed work for those communities. Market forces have not worked for 18 years, and they never will: we want a fresh start.

Mr. Battle: I thank my hon. Friend for his questions. I shall be glad to visit his constituency and others where communities have been badly scarred by Conservative Government policies. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. There is need for co-ordination—for joined-up thinking between Departments—to ensure that the range of regeneration measures are targeted on those communities which need them most. I hope that the Department of Trade and Industry may act as catalysts in this matter to ensure that those communities which are most in need get that help.

Mr. Evans: What will the Minister say to unemployed people in Bolsover and in other ex-coalfield areas about the slap-happy dogma that the Labour party intend to introduce, with such things as the social chapter, the minimum wage and the introduction of a 48-hour directive? Does he really believe that the increased unemployment in those areas that will result from the introduction of those policies is a price worth paying?

Mr. Battle: I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman's slap-happy language. From 1984, the Conservative Government presided over the loss of 50,000 jobs in the coal industry, and more than 40 mines were closed in the area represented in part by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner). Perhaps the former President of the Board of Trade—the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who shut the pits without proper economic restructuring packages—should be answering these questions, although I am glad, and I believe that most of the country is glad, that he is no longer in a position to do so.

Mr. Eric Clarke: I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on his elevation to the Government Front Bench. Will he give me and other Members who represent coal mining areas a guarantee that the Government will pursue in Europe the Rechar money that is still available? Will he ensure that that money, along with the rest of Government subsidies, goes in the direction that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has spoken about?

Mr. Battle: The answer to my hon. Friend is yes. It is part of that co-ordination to ensure that policies are put together, and that includes calling on European programmes. I am happy to say that I shall take forward that approach.

Trade Unions

5. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to introduce new rights of statutory recognition for trade unions. [659]

Madam Speaker: Mr. McCartney.

The Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry (Mr. Ian McCartney): I am sorry, Madam Speaker. I still do not quite believe that we—Labour—are on the Government Benches. I am here, however, and I am enjoying it.

The Government will introduce legislation establishing a right to union recognition where a majority of a relevant work force vote in a ballot for a union to represent them. We shall consult fully on the most effective means of introducing this right.

Mr. Fallon: We can hardly believe that the hon. Gentleman is on the Government Front Bench, either. Nevertheless, I congratulate him on his appointment.

Given the Secretary of State's desire for a closer partnership with business, will the Minister name one business organisation that is in favour of wider rights of union recognition?

Mr. McCartney: First, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on returning to this place. My constituents did not feel short-changed in booting him out. I welcome him back.

The position is simple: the Government believe in having a partnership with industry, a right to join a trade union and for that union to be recognised if a majority of the work force expresses the wish in a secret ballot for that to be the position. That is why we are consulting. It is clear that industry wants a fresh start. It wants a Government who are for partnership, who want to work with it in motivating the work force and working generally in a way that improves competitiveness in British industry.

I am confident that when we have finished the consultation process and bring forward legislation we shall have the wholehearted support of trade unions and industry generally on the basis that we are a Government

who offer fairness and not favours—unlike the previous Government, who always wanted favours for themselves while denying fairness to others.

Mrs. Mahon: I, too, welcome my hon. Friend to his new position. I am sure that he will undertake his responsibilities extremely well.

What message would my hon. Friend send to a company in my constituency, named Wescol, which has recently sacked the night shift for asking for recognition? Surely that is not the sort of partnership that we want.

Mr. McCartney: I thank my hon. Friend for her supplementary question, which illustrates clearly why it is important to provide a right for individuals to join a union and for that organisation to represent their interests. That is why 88 per cent. of the most successful companies in Britain recognise unions and provide opportunities for their employees to be represented by them. As for those companies which do not adopt that approach and which act unfairly, the legislation that we shall introduce will ensure fairness across the board. It will ensure that, when employees want recognition rights and vote for them, they will get them.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I join in welcoming the new Front-Bench team to their new posts, especially the Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney). When the hon. Gentleman gets used to standing at the Dispatch Box and facing questions, he may discover that he is there to answer them—unlike the response that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon).

Will the Minister confirm that the purpose of the proposed legislation is to increase the proportion of unionised firms in the United Kingdom from what it might otherwise have been, and to restore the influence of the trade union movement in our industrial and corporate affairs? I am sure that he would agree with that. It follows on Mr. Edmonds's advice to members of the Labour party when he said:

"Let us trust in the years ahead every time a Labour MP walks through the chamber of the House of Commons they remember the help they received from the GMB and so many other trade unions."

The Minister speaks of partnership. Does he envisage a return to the so-called social partnership and the corporatist policies of yesterday, when a bigger trade union movement joined industry and Government in framing industrial and economic policies? I suspect that he personally agrees with that. Will that be added to the new social chapter with its proposals for works councils in every company with more than 50 employees? How does all that square with the Chancellor of the Exchequer's reference yesterday to flexible labour markets?

Mr. McCartney: First, when I stand at the Dispatch Box and answer for my Government, I know—unlike the right hon. and learned Gentleman—that the rest of the Government support me. Secondly, this Government are not looking to the past—unlike the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who is locked in the past. The Government are looking to the future. What can be wrong with the principle that someone joins a union and, in a secret ballot, seeks recognition? That is granted as part of a partnership in which we motivate the work force through skills and investment in training so as to ensure that Britain becomes the number one economic driving force in Europe, whereas the right hon. and learned Gentleman tried to make it the sweatshop of Europe.

Fireworks

6. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her Department's review of firework safety regulations. [660]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Nigel Griffiths): I plan to introduce a number of new controls on fireworks. Draft regulations will be issued later this month. The proposals include statutory measures and I am confident that many of them will enjoy the support of safety bodies and of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Mr. Burden: I welcome my hon. Friend to his new role and pay tribute to the work on firework safety that he did in opposition. We welcome a Government who put public safety first in these matters. Will my hon. Friend address the issue of enforcement as there is evidence that some firms, albeit a minority, may be seeking to get round the existing regulations?

Mr. Griffiths: My hon. Friend fought tirelessly for a ban on aerial shells and other dangerous fireworks, and we plan to ensure that those are kept out of the hands of the public. Anyone seeking to get round the prohibition by using bogus legal arguments will be the subject of swift action by trading standards officers.

Mr. Garnier: What was the value of fireworks imported from China last year?

Mr. Griffiths: I do not have the figures, but I will happily let the hon. Gentleman have them. The history of the Conservative Government in limiting dangerous fireworks coming into this country was woeful. Through the measures that I have outlined, which will go out for consultation shortly, we intend to tackle as effectively as we can the terrible problems that fireworks have caused, and which have resulted in a 50 per cent. increase in the number of injuries over the past five or six years.

Mr. Heppell: Will my hon. Friend keep in mind the tragic death of 10-year-old Dale Mitchell in my constituency, and remember that the age at which people can buy fireworks should be reconsidered, which is one of the things that the Mitchell family wants?

Mr. Griffiths: I can assure my hon. Friend that we shall consider that. I well remember joining him to present a 17,000-name petition to protest about the weak fireworks regulations. The efforts that he put into the fireworks safety campaign will bear fruit on bonfire night this year, and I pay tribute to him.

Rev. Martin Smyth: The Government have come in with a bang and I welcome Ministers to the Front Bench. Despite the Minister's assurance that he will tighten up

on regulations, is he satisfied—given the role of Chinese crackers and other fireworks—that the regulations are being properly enforced?

Mr. Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman knows exactly what he is talking about. It is important that the fireworks that he mentions should be rigorously controlled. I am confident that the consultation document will specifically consider those fireworks. Trading standards and other enforcement officers in tandem must ensure that the law is upheld and that the future tougher regulations bring the real benefits that all hon. Members seek.

Business Rates

7. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has received from businesses concerning the future of business rates. [661]

Mrs. Roche: To date, my departmental colleagues and I have not received any formal representations from businesses on the future of business rates. However, we have given a manifesto commitment to return to locally set business rates and will be consulting widely on how that might be implemented.

Mr. Jenkin: Does the hon. Lady agree that small businesses already pay too much in business rates?

Mrs. Roche: I certainly agree that the unified business rate introduced by the previous Government, of which the hon. Gentleman was a supporter, is widely loathed and is an unfair tax, according to the "Your Business Matters" conference, as reported by the Institute of Directors. We need a system that is fair to business and does not place an undue burden on small businesses.

Mr. William O'Brien: When considering the future of the uniform business rate, will the Minister have a word with her colleagues about those businesses which have their rates assessed on turnover rather than profit? They are at a disadvantage because the margin is so low that in many areas they face tremendous problems in sustaining their business. In many instances, it is a question of valuation. I appeal to my hon. Friend to have a word with her colleagues at the Department of the Environment about business rates and the assessments that take place from time to time which are unfair to many small businesses.

Mrs. Roche: My hon. Friend raises some important points and I can assure him that they will all be taken into consideration as part of the consultation exercise.

Mr. Nicholls: Does it not follow from what the hon. Lady said to my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) that she will be minded to pick up a proposal made in the Conservative party manifesto that the burden of rates should be shifted so that smaller business pays less and greater business pays more, or is it simply that the hon. Lady's apparent conservatism goes no further than rhetoric?

Mrs. Roche: I am astonished at what the hon. Gentleman says. He supported a Government who introduced the uniform business rate, which has been widely criticised by business. It was his hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) who produced a document called "Fairer Business Rates", and his right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), the former Prime Minister, who described the uniform business rate as an unfair burden. The present Government are determined to do something to help our business community and I am sure that we shall have the hon. Gentleman's support as a result.

Pit Closures

8. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to meet representatives of companies affected by the coal mines closure programme. [662]

Mr. Battle: I am happy to meet and listen to representatives from the coal industry—as I have done in the past and since the election—and more contacts are planned.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I warmly welcome my hon. Friend to his new position and wish him well in the work that he is doing. I draw his attention to the impact of the coal closure programme on companies such as British Jeffrey Diamond in the mining engineering sector in Wakefield. When my hon. Friend meets UK coal producers, will he remind them of the importance of purchasing British engineering products for British pits, particularly in areas such as Wakefield? To pick up the Secretary of State's earlier point on exports, will my hon. Friend actively press his Department to do far more to support the export efforts of companies such as British Jeffrey Diamond?

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his information about British Jeffrey Diamond. Mining engineering technology developed in Britain is second to none and has a long history of manufacturing and engineering expertise. I am tempted to say that it was neglected in previous times, but I hope that it will be fully supported now. We have export drives and promotion campaigns; there is one for mining in Poland. The aim of that campaign is to help UK exporters. We also want to improve markets here. If my hon. Friend will let me have details, I will ensure that companies are put in touch with the relevant officials and we may be able to make progress.

Small Businesses

9. **Mr. Singh:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Government's policy towards small businesses. [663]

Mrs. Roche: Small businesses are a vital part of the Government's programme because of their importance to the economy in the jobs they provide, the wealth they create and the new ideas and technology many of them develop.

Our priorities are: cutting red tape, taking tough action on late payment and improving information and support for small firms.

Mr. Singh: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on her appointment? Does she agree that the statutory right to

interest on late payments will help many businesses in my constituency and others that are plagued by enormous cash flow problems?

Mrs. Roche: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. He is right to draw attention to the enormous problems that late payment of commercial debt causes our small businesses. I am delighted that it was announced in the Gracious Speech that the Government will introduce a fair payment of commercial debts Bill.

Mr. Whittingdale: I am gratified to learn that the Minister has read the pamphlet by my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). I hope that she found it enlightening. Will she tell the House what the Government will do to help reduce the burden of business rates on small businesses?

Mrs. Roche: We have a manifesto commitment, and we have stated that we will have a consultative programme, which is more than the previous Government had in 18 years in imposing that burden. We will localise the business rate and enable proper consultation between local firms and local authorities, because that is vital. The hon. Gentleman might care to consult the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who was a member of the previous Administration's deregulation task force, which fully supported our proposals.

Mr. Stevenson: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons the Tories lost the election was that they failed to support small businesses, especially through the business rate? Is she also aware that, in my constituency, council tax has not increased for two years, but business rates have gone up by no less than 30 per cent? That happened under the Conservatives, who are the enemy of small businesses.

Mrs. Roche: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right. It is clear from speaking to small business people throughout the country that concern about the business rate is at the top of their minds.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: What is the Minister going to do?

Mrs. Roche: It is no use the Tories protesting. The previous Government organised the "Your Business Matters" conference, at which the UBR and the business rate were at the top of the agenda for concern. Who introduced the UBR? The Tories.

Mr. Page: May I congratulate the hon. Lady on being appointed the Minister with responsibility for small businesses? I wish her every success, with my hands out straight and no fingers crossed. As the Government are getting used to U-turns, may I ask for one more—on the social chapter? If that is not possible, will the Minister lobby furiously for an opt-out or derogation for small firms? Small firms will create employment, but they will be hit hard by the minimum wage. Let them not be hit hard by the social chapter. I do not mean the social chapter of today, but the one that will follow as soon as we are foolish enough to sign the agreement.

Mrs. Roche: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words and for his great courtesy to me when I was his shadow. It was much appreciated. He should consider the wording of the social chapter. I know that the former Chancellor did not read the Maastricht treaty, but there is no excuse for not reading the social chapter, which expressly mentions small firms and says that nothing will be done under the chapter mechanism that places an undue administrative burden on them. We made it very clear that we would use the mechanism to promote employability and competitiveness, and that is what we will do.

Aerospace Industry

10. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions her Department has held with the United Kingdom aerospace industry on the impact of the merger of Boeing and McDonnell Douglas. [664]

Mr. Battle: The Department is in constant dialogue with the United Kingdom aerospace industry on a range of issues, including future competitive challenges. It is important that the sector should be in a strong position to meet those challenges over the coming months and years.

Mr. Pike: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his new appointment, and wish him and his team well for the years ahead.

As my hon. Friend knows, the aerospace industry is crucial to the UK economy, particularly in Lancashire, and the merger will have a tremendous effect on it, both in the UK and in Europe. Will my hon. Friend take all possible steps to ensure that the Government work with the industry to make certain that it is not squeezed, and that we do not lose jobs as a result of the merger that is taking place in the United States?

Mr. Battle: Yes. The UK aerospace industry is the third largest in the western world, employing more than 110,000 people. Exports alone are worth about £7 billion. The industry is the second largest source of research and development, and there are spin-offs into other industries.

It is not usual for Ministers to comment on the details of mergers, but I can tell my hon. Friend that this is a matter for the European Commission and the United States competition authorities. The Government are closely following the Commission's investigation of the proposed merger. The parties are providing the Commission with further information, so it is not yet time to take a firm UK view; but I emphasise that the Government are keen to support the aerospace industry and enable it to develop, not least through support for research and development, which we hope will strengthen the sector and secure even more jobs.

Sir Peter Emery: Will the Minister implore the President of the Board of Trade to pay particular attention to Britain's role in the space industry? We shall be able to have a great deal of new business if that is done properly. Will the Minister ensure that our commitment to the European Space Agency is properly fulfilled?

Mr. Battle: Again, the answer is yes. We intend to do even better than the last Government in that respect.

Political Donations

11. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make it her policy that prior to companies making political donations a ballot of shareholders must be held. [665]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: There is great public concern about the source of certain party-political funds. I know that my hon. Friend will warmly welcome the Government's commitment in the Queen's Speech to reforming the regulation and funding of political parties.

Mr. Winnick: Indeed I do.

Is it not the case that, since 1913, no trade union has been able to donate money for political purposes unless it has first held and won a political ballot? As that is the case, and has been for many years, what justification can there be for companies not holding a similar ballot among shareholders? All we want is a level playing field, equality and fairness. I hope that that will soon come about.

Mr. Griffiths: As my hon. Friend has rightly pointed out, there is an inconsistency. The Government will make an announcement shortly about how they propose to take forward reform of the funding of political parties.

Mr. Rowe: How many companies that contributed to the Labour party's funds in the run-up to the general election would be affected by the proposal?

Mr. Griffiths: I suspect that, if more companies are involved now than were under the Conservatives, it is a reflection of the terrible service that the Conservative Government gave businesses large and small. Perhaps that is why the hon. Gentleman finds himself in his present sad seat.

Manufacturing Investment

12. **Dr. Kumar:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to increase total manufacturing investment in the United Kingdom. [666]

Mrs. Beckett: Increased investment will come only with economic stability and the right framework for business competitiveness. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has laid the foundations for the first. Yesterday, I announced an agenda for the second, which includes working with business to promote long-term investment.

Dr. Kumar: I am grateful for that answer, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her appointment. I am sure that she will make a grand success of the job compared with the Tories. May I draw her attention to the fact that, in 1978 under the previous Labour Government, the manufacturing sector in Teesside employed 94,000 people, but by 1995 that figure had fallen to 47,000, which is a decrease of 50 per cent. May I urge her and the Government to set new standards? Our manufacturing economic base should be our first priority, and I urge her to lead from the front on that issue.

Mrs. Beckett: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. We are pleased to see him back in the House in his rightful place. I am particularly pleased because he is a native of my constituency. I share his view about the huge importance of manufacturing and the need for new opportunities in manufacturing. I have long held the view that one of the worst features—there were many to choose from—of the previous Government's record during the 1980s was their neglect of, and even attacks on, manufacturing. That attitude needs to be reversed, and the Government will reverse it.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: In the past year, the right hon. Lady and I have spoken on the same platform about the importance of our manufacturing industry, and she knows my commitment to it. I believe that it is vital to a sound and progressive economy. Does she think that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will consider sympathetically the reintroduction of properly targeted and properly directed capital allowances? I believe that they are an effective way of encouraging positive investment in manufacturing industry.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not want to harm the hon. Gentleman's political career, but not only have we spoken about manufacturing on the same platform: sometimes we have said the same things about the importance of manufacturing and how it could be promoted. I share his view that it is very important. Like him, we have explored the importance of techniques such as he identified, especially at certain stages in the business cycle. I hope that the advisory group on competitiveness that I shall establish will, at an early stage, report on the most effective way to stimulate and promote investment, particularly in manufacturing, in the present climate.

Mr. MacShane: I welcome my right hon. Friend and her team to their jobs, because for the first time in 20 years we have Ministers who are from the manufacturing centres. May I invite her to consider the problem of the current strength of sterling, which is in the red zone? It is now less attractive to invest in the United Kingdom, and very attractive to buy overseas. Will she perhaps have a quiet word with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and ask him to consider what could be done to put sterling trade at a more competitive level for our exports of manufactured goods?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend also has a long record of concern for and advocacy of manufacturing industry. It is extremely important to have stability in the handling of economic affairs. In the long term, it contributes to lower inflation, higher investment and an improvement in general economic indicators, so that British industry becomes more competitive. The efforts of the Government and this team will be directed towards the competitiveness of British industry in the long term.

Mr. Ian Taylor: The right hon. Lady has the most stimulating job in government, and I am sure that she will find it exciting. She should obviously bear it in mind that she has inherited from the previous Government a strong record on manufacturing investment. It was up 9 per cent. in the last quarter over the previous quarter, and manufacturing productivity was up 80 per cent. in the period 1979 to 1997. Will she commit herself to ensuring that science, technology and research play a big role in trying to stimulate manufacturing investment? As the

President of the Board of Trade and the champion of industry, will she take on, with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the concerns of industry about their investment plans, especially those that may be affected by the windfall tax?

Mrs. Beckett: I shall begin by answering the second part of the hon. Gentleman's question. As the windfall tax is by definition a tax that is to be levied on the excess profits of the privatised utilities, there will be no reason whatever for it to influence investment. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman asks about the role of science. I share his view about the importance of science and science policy, which is why I have asked my hon. Friend the Minister of State, the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), to take responsibility for it, and why I have taken specific responsibility for oversight of it.

I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman when he speaks about the "wonderful record" that we have inherited from the previous Government. As he says, in the first quarter of 1997 there was a sharp increase in manufacturing investment, but that is a sign of the peculiar, very patchy record of the Conservative Government and shows how difficult it is to justify the hon. Gentleman's claims because, despite that sharp rise in one quarter, the level of investment was no higher than it was at the end of 1995. Under the previous Government, there was no sustained improvement, only occasional blips in a generally poor record.

These issues are important. The British people have a right to know the truth about any Government's record on this matter and about the benchmark that the Government have inherited. For that reason, we are preparing, and I intend to publish, an audit of the true competitiveness of Britain that we inherited from the Conservative Government, warts and all. We shall publish anything that we find good in that record, but we shall also publish all the problems and criticisms that we have inherited. We shall be content to be judged on a true record and not on party propaganda.

Low Pay Commission

13. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her proposals to create a low pay commission. [667]

Mr. Ian McCartney: We have appointed Professor George Bain as chairman of the independent low pay commission. The other commission members, who will include representatives of employers, including small business, and employees, will be appointed as soon as practicable. The commission will undertake wide-ranging consultation and take account of the economic circumstances prevailing at the time before making its recommendation to Government on the level at which the national minimum wage might be introduced.

Dr. Godman: I offer my compliments to my hon. Friend on his appointment. I had a wee bet with his sister Irene that he would become a Minister in a Labour Government. Unfortunately she has not yet paid up. Perhaps he could speak to her.

Many hundreds of families in my constituency who receive family credit will welcome the announcement about the low pay commission. Does my hon. Friend agree that family credit is a massive state subsidy to employers, many of whom are too mean to pay their employees a decent wage?

Mr. McCartney: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks about my sister. Perhaps her tardiness makes her a candidate for a seat on the low pay commission.

My hon. Friend raises a critical issue. Businesses in Britain have come to accept that low pay is deeply anti-competitive and anti-business. Employers who follow good employment practices are undermined by employers who use the tax system to subsidise their labour costs at the expense of those good employers. We need a balance between in-work benefits and the minimum wage. That is what the low pay commission is about and it is why so many employers want to serve on it. If we are not careful, we shall have to book Wembley stadium for the commission's first meeting.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Does the Minister agree with Professor George Bain, the new chairman of the low pay commission, who is reported to have said two days ago of the minimum wage:

"I would be surprised if there were not some job losses."

Mr. McCartney: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has entirely misquoted Professor George Bain. Professor Bain said that, if the minimum wage were set at an inappropriate level and did not take economic circumstances into account, there could be job losses. There is no evidence whatever that a minimum wage set at a sensible level in terms of economic circumstances would cause job losses. It will assist in the creation of jobs. Under the previous Administration, more than 200,000 jobs a month lay vacant on Employment Service records because people could not afford to take them. We need a minimum wage that is set in such a way that it makes jobs affordable, as part of welfare to work, to move people off benefit into work, giving them an opportunity to earn.

How can members of a previous Government, who allowed former Tory Ministers who lost their seats in 1992 to receive up to £500 a day for turning up at quango meetings, stand here and criticise 800,000 families who are trying to survive on under £2.50 an hour?

Post Office

15. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the future of the Post Office. [669]

Mrs. Beckett: We have initiated a review of options for implementing our election manifesto pledge to grant the Post Office greater commercial freedom to take advantage of new challenges and opportunities, both domestically and internationally. The review will enable us to develop a coherent and comprehensive policy programme for the Post Office, something which the previous Government so signally failed to do.

Mr. Gapes: May I welcome my right hon. Friend in three ways: first, to her appointment; secondly, for her statement about the future of the Post Office; and, thirdly, on behalf of my constituents, for the action that she and

my hon. Friend the Minister of State, the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), took to reprieve Ilford Crown post office, which has been a fantastically popular decision? I thank the Government on behalf of my constituents.

Mrs. Beckett: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks and his welcome. I am very familiar with the valiant campaign that he and so many of my hon. Friends fought on that issue in the interests of their constituents. I know that his remarks will find an echo with many of them.

Mr. Yeo: In view of the unsatisfactory level of service that many of my constituents and people in other parts of the country receive from the Royal Mail, and the extraordinary success in raising standards of service in industries that have been privatised, will full-scale privatisation be among the options considered in the right hon. Lady's review?

Mrs. Beckett: No, it will not. The Post Office, even under the previous Government, who did nothing but undermine and interfere with it, is one of the most commercially and professionally successful post offices in the world. I am appalled as well as surprised that the hon. Gentleman should be so critical. The Post Office hopes, believes and will show in its future plans that, given the commercial freedom denied on dogmatic grounds by the previous Government, it will be able substantially to improve service. What the hon. Gentleman hates is that it will do so in public ownership.

Low Pay

16. **Mr. Bennett:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made about the impact of low wages on the competitiveness of British industry. [670]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The introduction of the national minimum wage will encourage industry to compete on the quality of the goods and services they provide rather than by a downward spiral of low pay. By raising morale, it will lead to greater employee commitment and reduced absenteeism, staff turnover and recurring training costs.

Mr. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend share my concern for a constituent who is faced with the sack because he would not work two weekends of overtime? Due to his low pay, had he worked those two weekends, he would have lost his entitlement to family credit, housing benefit and council tax benefit. Is not that appalling? Would not it be far better to force employers to pay a decent wage so that people could be floated off such benefits?

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend describes exactly why the in-work benefit system has become a grotesque subsidy to employers instead of assistance to low-paid workers and their employment opportunities. For my hon. Friend's constituent, the subsidy means that the employer does not pay to a level on the sure-or-not basis of knowing that the state will pick up his or her labour costs. I reassure my hon. Friend that, from day one of employment, wherever his constituents work, they will be entitled to a national minimum wage.

Mr. Streeter: I genuinely understand the concerns about low pay, but is not the Minister aware that in the west country especially there are many small businesses, particularly hotels and guest houses, where the owners make a very modest profit and could not afford the hourly rates of pay that the low pay commission is talking about? What will the Minister say to the thousands of young people in the west country who lose their jobs when the Labour Government introduce a minimum wage?

Mr. McCartney: The low pay commission is not discussing any rates, and it has not yet met or even been established—but watch this space. Increasingly, small business organisations support in principle the concept of a minimum wage. Many companies in the catering industry, such as Whitbread, now publicly support the concept of a national minimum wage in principle. Across all sectors of the economy, survey after survey shows support from employers for the minimum wage. The only people who oppose the minimum wage are Tory Members and their fat cat supporters.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Mr. Alastair Goodlad (Eddisbury): May I ask the Leader of the House for the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 9 JUNE—Debate on the European Union on a Government motion.

Motion on the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 compensation scheme.

TUESDAY 10 JUNE—Second Reading of the Local Government Finance (Supplementary Credit Approvals) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 11 JUNE—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Second Reading of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

THURSDAY 12 JUNE—Motion on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Stratford Station and Subsidiary Works) Order.

Motion on the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996 (Amendment) Order.

FRIDAY 13 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

MONDAY 16 JUNE—Progress in Committee on the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at 7 pm.

Mr. Goodlad: I thank the right hon. Lady for the business as far as it goes. She seems again to have forgotten her promise to do her best to give us the business for two weeks. I wonder whether she can give us any idea of the business for the remainder of the week commencing 16 June.

Can the right hon. Lady tell us when the motions to set up the departmental Select Committees will be tabled and when the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges will be set up? There is a desire on both sides of the House to proceed with that as a matter of urgency, not least in the light of the position of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar).

Does the right hon. Lady agree that, given the range of subjects that will be covered at the forthcoming intergovernmental conference in Amsterdam, the Government's determination to take this country into the social chapter, their intention to concede further qualified majority voting and the need for them to set out their position in respect of a single currency in the light of developments in France and Germany this week, it would be appropriate for the Prime Minister to speak in the debate on Europe on Monday rather than the departmental Minister? Can she confirm that the Prime Minister will make a statement to the House after the conference?

Will the right hon. Lady arrange for an early statement to clarify how the Government intend to resist pressure from our European partners for all companies with more than 50 staff to set up works councils or face sanctions?

Will the right hon. Lady arrange for an early statement about the announcement on union recognition made yesterday by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to the GMB annual conference, about which the Queen's Speech was noticeably reticent? Could such a statement include an interpretation of the remarks of Mr. John Edmonds of the GMB, who expressed the view that every Labour Member should continue to remember the help that they received from the GMB and so many other trade unions?

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that the Deputy Prime Minister's secret discussions with the public sector unions yesterday included the possibility of abandoning compulsory competitive tendering, and will she arrange for her right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to make an early statement on that matter?

Can the right hon. Lady tell us whether we might expect a statement on the Government's defence review, which was announced outside the House during the Whitsun recess?

Will the right hon. Lady make an early statement on whether the Prime Minister plans to attend the transfer of sovereignty ceremonies in Hong Kong? Will an early statement be made on the Government's attitude to the Prime Minister's attending the proposed swearing-in of the provisional legislature?

Is it not clear that concern has increased in the House and among the public at the politicisation of the civil service? Last week, Sir Michael Bett, the First Civil Service Commissioner, publicly expressed his misgivings about the Government's behaviour. Will the Leader of the House confirm that she will arrange for an early debate in Government time on the matter, which has constitutional implications, and publish in advance the names and salaries of all political appointees?

Yesterday, a point of order was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton) on allegations that political appointees who have not been positively vetted have sought or gained access to classified material, which can be handled only by those who have been positively vetted. Will the right hon. Lady tell us when we can expect a statement in the House on that matter, which has serious security implications?

Will the right hon. Lady confirm that any announcement by the Home Secretary about changes to the primary purpose rule will be made first in a statement to the House?

Mrs. Taylor: I shall deal with all the points raised by the shadow Leader of the House. I, too, regret that it is not possible at this stage in the Parliament, because our business is only starting, to give more advance warning of what will happen. We shall, however, start to do so in future weeks, as the pattern of business becomes clearer.

I share the concern expressed by the shadow Leader of the House that departmental Select Committees should be established as soon as possible. Some discussions have already taken place, and we can build on those. This week, we have been able to establish a couple of Committees that are dealing with more urgent matters. I agree that establishing the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges is a priority, and I hope that we shall be able to do so before long.

As for the Government's agenda at Amsterdam, a range of documents will have to be considered on Monday, partly because the previous Government were reluctant to discuss some of the issues in the House. Monday's debate

will be opened by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The shadow Leader of the House asked whether the Prime Minister would be willing to make a statement after Amsterdam. I can confirm that that is the situation, and that a statement will be made to the House.

The proposals on works councils that are currently being discussed are ones that have not found favour. My right hon. Friends have made it clear that they will want to consider very carefully any proposals on that matter.

On the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: The House knows my views on electronic devices.

Mrs. Taylor: Madam Speaker, the House shares those views.

In his comments at this week's conference, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment said that there should be consultations on those issues. There will be wide consultation, which I hope will be generally welcomed.

The shadow Leader of the House suggested that the Deputy Prime Minister had had secret discussions. If the discussions were so secret, I am not sure how he knows so much about them. It is not a matter of abandoning any system of value for money within local authorities. Questions have already been answered in the House about CCT, and the Government have made it clear that we want local authorities, and everyone else, to ensure that best value for money on all contracts is obtained.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has said that he will conduct a defence review, which is what the Government said they would do before and during the general election.

Statements have already been made on Hong Kong, making it clear that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the changeover. I think that the Prince of Wales will also attend. The question of anyone else attending remains open, and final decisions have not yet been made.

The shadow Leader of the House was not correct in his interpretation of Sir Michael Bett's opinion on political advisers. Sir Michael Bett said that, at this stage, he was not concerned about what has happened, and I think that hon. Members have tried to take his comments out of context. There is no reason to have any debate on that issue. We shall, of course, follow normal practice on publication of names and salaries.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is answering a parliamentary question on the primary purpose rule. That is in general the procedure that has been adopted with other changes in the immigration rules.

On the question about positive vetting, my understanding is that very few special or political advisers have any need to be positively vetted, as they do not see material that comes into that category. The only person who does come into that category is Jonathan Powell, the Prime Minister's chief of staff. He has been positively vetted in the past and that is being renewed.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On the delicate matter of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, will my right hon. Friend reflect on the fact that, back in February and March, some of us chided Tony Newton on the delay in publishing the report, yet now my right hon. Friend is saying, "before long". What is the difficulty? Is it drowned in a mire of lawyers?

Mrs. Taylor: The difficulty is in having proper consultations. People who are interested in that Committee might be interested in other Committees as well, so we have to consider the matter carefully. It is in the interests of every Member of this House—past and, I hope, present—that the report that causes my hon. Friend concern is published as soon as possible. That will be a decision for the new Committee.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): Has not almost every Labour Minister said frequently from the Dispatch Box that there is a need for open government to be practised by the new Government? Does the right hon. Lady agree with that? If so, will she now do two things? The first is to publish a list of all the review bodies and consultative bodies mentioned in every ministerial speech from the Dispatch Box, so that we can keep up to speed on that matter.

Secondly—following on from what my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House said—as political advisers to Secretaries of State are likely to see documents that would usually require positive vetting, will the right hon. Lady list all the political advisers and those who have or have not been positively vetted and publish their salaries?

Mrs. Taylor: On the last point, I made the position clear to the shadow Leader of the House. There is not a whole raft of people required to undergo positive vetting. Were they required to do so, that would be carried out. However, as far as I have been able to determine, only one person falls into that category.

With regard to a list of review bodies, Ministers are responsible for any that they establish and I do not propose to keep a central list.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend will be aware that, despite Conservative protestations, the Conservative Government intended to sack more than 300 Customs and Excise officers. In the fight against drugs, it is absolutely essential that we retain the highest level of care. Having just returned from Colombia, I know the enormous reputation of British customs for its superb work. Can my right hon. Friend find time in the coming week to make that clear to the House?

Mrs. Taylor: I am not sure about the coming week, but I am happy to join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the work that Customs and Excise officers do, especially on the difficult issue of drugs. They have performed extremely hard and difficult work to good effect, although there are still many problems to be tackled. I shall bring my hon. Friend's comments to the attention of my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary, as I know that she is also concerned to ensure that Customs and Excise officers are there in the numbers required and able to do the job for which they are appointed.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Given that the Government announced this week, by way of a written

[Mr. Robert Key]

answer, that there would be no statement on the defence estimates this year, will the right hon. Lady ensure that there is a debate on defence before the House rises this summer? The defence of the realm cannot wait for another Labour review.

Mrs. Taylor: I am not sure that there will be a debate before the House rises for the summer, but there will be defence debates in the normal course of events and I think it inconceivable that there will not be one during the next few months.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke–on–Trent, North): May I bring to my right hon. Friend's attention the concerns of many in Staffordshire about the reduction in the number of continuing care beds for the mentally frail and elderly? Does my right hon. Friend intend that there will be an early opportunity to debate the issue in the House? There is a genuine concern among elderly people about the closure of beds.

Mrs. Taylor: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is taking a hard look at mental health services in hospitals and in the community. We must ensure that those services are provided in the best interests of the patient and of the community. I am sure that my hon. Friend's comments will be taken into account.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Will the right hon. Lady consider having an urgent debate on responsibilities and ministerial manpower in the Department for Education and Employment? Whereas there used to be three Ministers responsible for school matters, there now appear to be only two. That is causing problems. Already, colleagues have received a letter discouraging too many delegations to Ministers. The situation has resulted in a delay in the decision on the age of transfer in my local education authority in Buckinghamshire, causing great anxiety to parents, pupils, teachers and the local education authority. I believe that the explanation for the delay is inadequate ministerial manpower.

Mrs. Taylor: It is unusual for Conservatives to request more Ministers in a Department. I hope that the difficulties that the hon. Lady suggests do not exist—that has not been my experience. I should have thought that the activities of the Ministers in that Department, including this week's announcement about summer literacy schools, show that they are very much on top of their job.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): I know that we have a heavy legislative programme, because the Government have 26 Bills, but we are keen to get on with discussing many other proposals that were in our manifesto. Will it be possible to have a debate about a disability rights commission, which many of us have strongly advocated? We know that it will not be legislated for in the first year, but if we had a debate about it, perhaps we could work out where we stand, what the proposals are and when they could be delivered.

Mrs. Taylor: I respect my hon. Friend's long-term interest in the issue, but I cannot promise an immediate debate. However, I shall keep a list of the requests that could be processed if time allows. I shall ensure that his request about disability rights gets some consideration. I shall come back to him on that as soon as possible.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I support the plea of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) about Customs and Excise. She has identified a tremendous need. Does the Leader of the House agree that Thursday's motion on Northern Ireland is rather narrow? I should also like to know when we can look forward to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee being set up, so that it can get down to business.

Mrs. Taylor: I am sure that those who work in Customs and Excise will welcome the hon. Gentleman's support. Thursday's motion on Northern Ireland is specific, as he said. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has had discussions on the issue in the usual way. We are hoping for progress on the Grand Committee before long. Communications and discussions have been established, and we shall make progress as soon as we can.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): Will my right hon. Friend provide parliamentary time to debate important public safety issues, such as the discovery yesterday by trading standards officers in Reading of alcohol levels of up to 4.5 per cent. in freezerpops on sale to young children at retail outlets such as Asda and Kwik Save? My constituents are outraged that those products have caused illness in children as young as two. They are looking to the Government for action.

Mrs. Taylor: Many people will share my hon. Friend's concern. He used the most appropriate word when saying that people were outraged. It is not acceptable for a company to provide so-called freezerpops in that way. I understand that the items have been withdrawn, but the situation should not have arisen, and action must be taken to ensure that it is not repeated.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus): Is the Leader of the House aware of the disaster facing the fishing industry, especially over quota hopping, but that such issues are not part of the draft consolidated intergovernmental conference treaty? In addition to Monday's general debate on Europe, will the right hon. Lady arrange a debate specifically on fishing, or guarantee that her ministerial colleagues will raise the matter at the IGC?

Mrs. Taylor: My right hon. and hon. Friends who are involved in those discussions have been talking to colleagues within the European Union about the problem of quota hopping. We realise that it is a very difficult situation for many fishermen and, indeed, that it could be for the British consumer. The problem is of very long standing—the previous Government made no progress, which makes our task more difficult. However, I give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking that my right hon. and hon. Friends are pursuing the matter with all possible vigour.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Can my right hon. Friend, who is a keen football supporter, say what the Government have done to enable the Football Trust to

complete work on ground safety and other necessary work such as that now being undertaken at Bolton and that which has been undertaken at Burnley football club?

Mrs. Taylor: In view of my hon. Friend's last comment, I should perhaps again declare an interest in Bolton Wanderers. The Government have today announced a package of help for the Football Trust amounting to £55 million, half of which will come from the Football Association and Premier League and half from the Sports Council. That will enable many clubs, especially those in the lower divisions, to bring their grounds up to the required safety standard. All of us are very pleased that progress is being made.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Is the Leader of the House aware that, in a conference that is overlapping with business questions, the Deputy Prime Minister is announcing the publication of a White Paper on transport, a statement that should perhaps have been made to the House? Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) was delayed in coming here because he felt it necessary to monitor that statement. In view of the important position that transport and the environment allegedly have in the Labour party's manifesto, does not the Leader of the House believe that the Deputy Prime Minister's announcement should have been made in the House, thus allowing hon. Members to be here rather than having their attention divided?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mrs. Taylor: I am not sure why Conservative Members are saying, "Hear, hear," because the previous Government rarely announced White Papers in the House. My right hon. Friend is not announcing the publication of a White Paper; he is announcing that there is going to be a White Paper, which is a reasonable thing to announce outside the House. Clearly, there is a need for better co-ordination of transport policy with other aspects of Government policy. That is what my right hon. Friend has been emphasising, and he has made an important statement on World Environment day.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate on defence and foreign policy, which we have not yet debated in this Parliament? Such a debate would give the House the opportunity to discuss NATO expansion ahead of the Madrid summit that is due to take place in early July, and the proposed expansion of NATO has enormous financial implications and implications for nuclear proliferation.

Mrs. Taylor: I said earlier to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) that I could see no prospect of a defence debate in the very near future, or this side of the summer recess. However, I am sure that there will be such a debate before very long. Of course, we did not have the usual defence and foreign policy debate during consideration of the Queen's Speech. We might take that fact into account when considering the allocation of time for debates in the next few weeks.

Sir David Madel (South–West Bedfordshire): Does the right hon. Lady recall that, when she was shadow Leader of the Opposition, she was a strong supporter of the Jopling Committee and the reforms that it brought about? Will she therefore explain why the Government are this evening suspending the 10 o'clock rule on the Education (Schools) Bill? Why are the Government in such a rush? The spirit of Jopling was that debate on controversial legislation would stop at 7 o'clock on Thursdays. Why are the Government in such a hurry?

Mrs. Taylor: Of course, we want to get our business through—that is one of the responsibilities of a Government. I must correct the hon. Gentleman: I was not shadow Leader of the Opposition, but shadow Leader of the House—*[Interruption.]* Some hon. Members may not have known that. It is normal practice to use the 10 o'clock motion to protect Government business.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When can we debate early-day motion 57?

[That this House welcomes the statement of the Alzheimer's Disease Society of 28th May that in residential homes for the elderly many drugs are being inappropriately used, probably for the benefit of care home staff, which reinforces the recent recommendations of the Royal College of Physicians on the over-use of sedatives and a study in Glasgow that proved that 88 per cent. of elderly recipients of powerful neuroleptic drugs did not need them; is alarmed that alert residents of homes for the elderly are being reduced to a confused zombie-like state by inappropriate prescribing; and calls on the Government to investigate the prescribing of anti-psychotic drugs.]

The motion refers to the over-medication of the elderly in residential homes and, following the evidence given last week by the Alzheimer's Disease Society and the Royal College of Physicians, it is important to discuss that. The evidence shows that there is vast over-prescribing of neuroleptic anti-psychotic drugs in residential homes. In one study, 88 per cent. of the elderly residents were receiving those drugs when they did not need them. People who might well be frail physically, but alert mentally, are turned into a zombie-like state by those drugs. Do we not need to consider the matter urgently in the House?

Mrs. Taylor: I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a great deal of concern about the issue, and I shall bring his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I know that my right hon. Friend agrees that there is a need to encourage high standards of prescribing and that when drugs are made available, they must be of proven clinical effectiveness. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will listen to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), who may want to consider other ways in which he can take the matter further.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Leader of the House may be aware that my constituency of Fylde is the British home of the Eurofighter. She will also be aware of the considerable concern felt by many of my constituents at recent statements made by the German Government, which place in doubt their future funding intentions for that vital project. In the light of the discussions of the Secretary of State for Defence and the Prime Minister with their opposite numbers in Germany, may I have the right hon. Lady's assurance that she will arrange for

[Mr. Michael Jack]

a statement to be made to the House, both on the precise assurances that are being given to British Ministers about the project, and on exactly what the German Government have said about honouring their obligations?

Mrs. Taylor: The right hon. Gentleman will know that the Government are firmly committed to the Eurofighter programme. He will also know that it will provide the Royal Air Force with a multi-role aircraft with the operational flexibility to respond to the challenges that we might face in the future. As to the right hon. Gentleman's concerns about Germany's attitude, my right hon. and hon. Friends are actively seeking assurances from the Germans as a matter of priority.

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): The Leader of the House may not be aware of criticisms made by a judge in Nottingham this week following the stabbing of a child by someone with a known record of violence and abuse of children. May we have a statement by the Secretary of State for Health on the extent of under-funding of care in the community that this Government have inherited and the extent to which the social dumping of the mentally ill has been taking place? I hope that we can also seek to spell out the costs involved in providing adequate protection both for communities and for those with mental health problems.

Mrs. Taylor: As my hon. Friend says, there is a great deal of concern about such issues; unfortunately, this is not the only time that such incidents have taken place. As I said earlier, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is taking a hard look at mental health services, both in hospitals and in the community. We have to take into account not only the needs of the patient, but the safety of the public. My right hon. Friend is very much aware of the need to give further guidance and to try to ensure that such incidents do not happen in future.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Why is it necessary to use the Wednesday before and the Monday after the Amsterdam summit to discuss further draconian legislation on firearms, which will do nothing for public safety, when far more important issues relating to the summit—particularly the state of the beef sector—are crucial to our constituencies, which the House should discuss? When shall we see the new Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at the Dispatch Box telling us what he is doing about the problem? Will the right hon. Lady confirm that the Prime Minister will raise the issue at Amsterdam and ask other Prime Ministers of the European Union why, when the previous Government implemented all the measures agreed at the Florence summit, there is still a ban on British beef?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Conservative Government's record was one of delay and incompetence. That has made life infinitely more difficult for current Ministers, who have spent a great deal of time over the past few weeks trying to improve the situation. I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's criticism of them, given the background against which they have been operating.

I do not think that the vast majority of the public would agree with the hon. Gentleman that we should not be discussing extending the ban on firearms.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will my right hon. Friend find time to discuss the collapse of beef prices following the previous Government's mishandling of the BSE crisis? In Cowbridge market last week, finished cattle prices were lower than they were 14 years ago. That is a threat not just to the industry but to our rural environment. Just last week again, for the first time in recent memory, prime agricultural land could not be sold at auction. There will be no one to manage the countryside unless the problem is looked at.

Mrs. Taylor: I appreciate my hon. Friend's concern, and I am sure that he speaks for many of his constituents. Life has been very difficult for many people in the farming community. As I said earlier, Ministers are now trying to make progress. That is not made any easier by the climate created, and the attitude displayed, by the previous Government; but I assure my hon. Friend that the Government regard the matter as an important priority.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): In view of the comments by the newly appointed chairman of the low pay commission—he believes that the introduction of a minimum wage would destroy jobs—and in view of the fact that the jobs most at risk will be those held by young people with few skills, will the right hon. Lady arrange for a debate at an early date when we can fully discuss the new Government's threat to the employment prospects of young people in my constituency and elsewhere?

Mrs. Taylor: Ministers at the Board of Trade were answering questions about that a short time ago. They made it absolutely clear that the chairman-designate of the low pay commission has been quoted out of context. What he said was that there would be a problem only if the minimum wage was set at an unreasonable level, and only if economic circumstances were not taken into account.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the need for the A650 Bingley relief road in my constituency—a road that would bring immense economic and environment benefits to local people? I am fully aware that the Government are undertaking a review of transport policy; but will there be an early opportunity to debate the roads programme review on the Floor of the House?

Mrs. Taylor: As another west Yorkshire Member, I am fully aware of the work and campaigning done by my hon. Friend in that respect. As he says, the Department is conducting a review; before that review is complete, I do not think that a full-scale debate of the kind he would like would be appropriate or likely to take place. My hon. Friend may, however, wish to consider applying for an Adjournment debate or a Wednesday morning debate to advance his cause.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): When may we expect a statement—I hope for one next week—from the Government on their review of the roads programme? Certain road schemes appear to be in doubt, not least in my constituency. The former Government set a starting

date for the Manchester airport eastern link road and committed themselves to building it. That link road is now in question because of the roads review, which is causing great anxiety in the whole Cheadle area. I hope that the right hon. Lady will arrange for an early statement to the House, so that my constituents and those in other parts of the country who are similarly affected can find out exactly where they stand as soon as possible.

Mrs. Taylor: I think that that matter came up during Environment questions on Tuesday. The review must be thorough and serious, but we do not intend that it should be unduly delayed.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): Does the right hon. Lady understand that there is growing concern about the way in which she appears to be acquiescing in draconian timetabling of important legislation? I am referring not only to the guillotine on the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill this week and the fact that the Education (Schools) Bill that is before us today was given a Second Reading as recently as Monday of this week, but to the fact that similar treatment is being given to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill. The Second Reading debate on that Bill will be on Wednesday next week, one sitting day, and the Committee stage will be on Monday 16 June, which gives precious little time for important amendments to be tabled to what is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said, a draconian piece of legislation.

If the right hon. Lady cannot change the timetable for that piece of legislation at this late stage, will she at least guarantee that there will be a long period between Committee and Report, to enable amendments to be considered on Report that could not be considered in Committee?

Mrs. Taylor: The way in which we handled the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill and the way in which the guillotine motion was tabled ensured that some of the debates that were most important to those who were closely involved—the main debates—did take place. It is obvious that when we, like any other Government, are introducing our new programme, we must move quickly on certain Bills, for two reasons. First, we have time on the Floor of the House and it is a good use of that time; and secondly, the measures that we are talking about are all measures that we promised to introduce, and we would have been criticised had we not taken action on measures that were in our manifesto.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): As the Labour Government were elected on the rather empty promise that it would be easy to transfer spending from social security to education, and as it is now becoming evident that the actions necessary to control social security are being abandoned and it will be necessary to increase the money devoted to social security, may we have an early debate on the way in which the Government are already abandoning their pledges to the British people?

Mrs. Taylor: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been following any of the statements that have been made, not least by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. He has announced the first stages of our welfare-to-work programme—an approach that has been widely welcomed.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Can the right hon. Lady tell the House what the size of the compensation package under the firearms Bill is likely to be?

Mrs. Taylor: I do not have the details before me now. That matter was subject to discussion during the previous Parliament and flows directly from the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, which became an Act of Parliament during the previous Session.

Mr. Garnier: I am talking about the firearms Bill, not the Firearms (Amendment) Act.

Mrs. Taylor: If the hon. and learned Gentleman is talking about the new measures under the extension, they will be attached to the Bill, and he can then read all the details.

Points of Order

4.7 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It has been announced on Ceefax this afternoon that the Home Secretary intends to abolish the primary purpose rule in immigration—it is said, today—and make an announcement. I take it, because we have not had a ministerial statement, that no application has been made to you, but I wonder whether, through you, we might make a plea that any major change to the immigration laws such as the primary purpose rule should be announced to the House first, not communicated to us through a Teletext statement.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman might try to raise that point with the Leader of the House, who is at the Dispatch Box and no doubt heard what he had to say.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As a new Member, I seek your advice. Press reports today indicate that the 1922 Committee of the Conservative party is considering a scheme whereby Conservative Members for English constituencies—of course, there is no other kind—will be asked to take under their wing some Scottish constituencies, especially those that the Conservatives lost at the recent general election.

The public in Galloway and Upper Nithsdale have made a clear decision as to who they wish to represent them and who they do not wish to represent them. I understand that hon. Members do not interfere in the constituencies of other hon. Members. I wonder whether you would consider that matter, and in particular whether that so-called adoption scheme would breach the rules of the House.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will soon learn that I pay very little attention indeed to press reports but, as far as the substance of his question is concerned, it is entirely an internal party matter. It has nothing to do with me as Speaker and certainly nothing to do with this House.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Questions have been tabled by my colleagues and me, and today was the main day for reply. The questions have a specific bearing on the debate that is about to take place. The answers to those questions seem to be mysteriously not yet available.

Will you, Madam Speaker, guide me and the House? Surely there is a reasonable obligation on Ministers to provide answers in a timely manner to questions that are starred for a specific day, especially when the questions relate to a debate that is to be held in the Chamber.

Madam Speaker: Certainly, answers to all such questions should be available by 3.30 pm. I shall make it my business on leaving the Chair to ascertain what has happened.

Orders of the Day

Education (Schools) Bill

Considered in Committee.

[MR. MICHAEL J. MARTIN *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

ABOLITION OF ASSISTED PLACES SCHEME IN ENGLAND AND WALES

4.10 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 1, line 20, leave out '1996–97' and insert '1999–2000'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 29, in clause 2, page 1, line 22, leave out '1997–98' and insert '1999–2000'.

No. 30, in page 2, line 25, leave out '1997–98' and insert '1999–2000'.

No. 15, in clause 3, page 3, line 25, at end insert—

'(g) prescribe circumstances in which existing participation agreements due to terminate at the end of the 1997–98 school year may be extended by a period of up to two years.'.

No. 31, in clause 5, page 4, line 40, leave out '1997–98' and insert '1999–2000'.

No. 32, in page 5, line 4, leave out '1997–98' and insert '1999–2000'.

No. 33, in page 5, line 8, leave out '1997–98' and insert '1999–2000'.

No. 17, in clause 7, page 6, line 36, leave out '1997' and insert '1998'.

Mrs. Gillan: First, Mr. Martin, I welcome you to the Chair. I take the opportunity of extending a welcome to the occupants of the Government Front Bench. I think that I welcomed all of them individually on Second Reading except for the Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris). We shall be covering some familiar territory that the hon. Lady and I enjoyed debating during the Education Bill 1997. She was then joined by her redoubtable colleague the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). We shall miss the hon. Gentleman greatly from our education debates both this afternoon and evening and in future.

I offer the apologies of my right hon. Friend the Member for South–West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), the shadow Secretary of State. She is not in robust health at the moment. We wish her a speedy recovery. She will be back with us, no doubt, at the beginning of next week.

The Second Reading debate took place as recently as the beginning of this week, and the tone of it certainly set the proposed legislation in context. We have tabled the amendments because of that tone.

The Bill was introduced with indecent haste. It seems that the Government could not wait to rush headlong into abolishing assisted places. I accept that the then Labour Opposition promised to do so 18 years ago, which means that they had to wait 18 years before fulfilling their promise. The tone of the debate on Monday, however, showed their true hostility to independent schools and their hostility to the admirable assisted places scheme.

The APS has widened opportunities for able children from less well-off families throughout almost the entire period during which we had Conservative Governments from 1979. More than 80,000 children have been educated in a variety of schools under that admirable scheme. The list includes some of the most well-known independent schools, not least Fettes, the school of the Prime Minister, which provides assisted places to many children who come from less well-off families than the family of the Prime Minister.

I am proud that my old school, Cheltenham ladies college—I believe that I have been joined in the House by two old girls from the college, albeit not on the Opposition Benches—is represented on the Government Benches. Like me, they attended at a time when only those parents who could afford the astronomical fees were able to have their daughters educated there. The opportunity that they and I received is now being summarily taken away from children whose parents do not have enough money to meet those fees.

The effect of the Bill is to turn independent schools into a socio-economic exclusive zone. Only the children of the very well-off will be able to take up a place at those schools, unless schemes are introduced to replace the present Government funding under the assisted places scheme.

The take-up of the scheme has been practically 100 per cent. at all stages. It is extremely popular with parents. Although the Government have pooh-poohed the results achieved by children holding assisted places, there is no doubt that when we examine the academic results across GCSEs and A-levels, children who hold assisted places repeatedly out-perform children in other forms of education.

4.15 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Can the hon. Lady tell the House whether that statement is universally true? Will she acknowledge that, although at the first schools involved in the assisted places scheme, 50 per cent. of the students were gaining five or more good GCSEs, at the schools that have more recently entered the APS, only 19 per cent. of the students are getting five or more good GCSEs? Will she accept that standards are not uniformly high at all the schools involved in the scheme?

Mrs. Gillan: No, I do not accept that. The proportion of pupils in assisted places who achieved grades A to C at GCSE, if I remember correctly, was of the order of 90 per cent. Over the period that the scheme has existed, it has been shown consistently that pupils holding assisted places have out-performed pupils in other areas of the education system.

The Government have rushed headlong to end the scheme. Conservative Members have continually challenged their intentions. The Government said that the abolition of the scheme was based on two premises: that it would reduce class sizes and that it would benefit the many, not the few.

The claim that class sizes would be reduced has been challenged by the independent schools and by commentators without a vested interest. When the Chartered Institute of Public Finance examined the goals that the Government had set to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, it estimated that there was a gap of at least £250 million between the money that may be saved by the abolition of the APS and the money required to keep that pledge.

The Government have consistently failed to give us details of the financial mechanisms. How are the 38,000 pupils who are currently being educated in the assisted places scheme to be absorbed by the state system? What provisions will be made for the extra numbers of pupils who will have to be accommodated by the local education authorities?

Can we be assured that the type of education that would have been available to pupils who could reasonably have expected to take up an assisted place will be available to them in the state sector? I refer to the variety in the curriculum offered by independent schools, the amount of sport played at those schools and the general terms and conditions surrounding education in independent schools. How can the Government ensure similar provision for those pupils in the state sector?

The costs have been fudged over and over again. One of the ways in which the Government have tried to hide the real costs is by saying that an assisted place costs some £800 more on average than a place in the state sector. But they have failed to take into account the capital costs that LEAs will incur in expanding schools to take the extra pupils.

I hope that the Minister will tell us how he will find the money to ensure that LEAs, such as that in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), do not find themselves in dire circumstances as a result having to absorb those pupils who will no longer be eligible for assisted places.

The amendments have been designed to make the Government stop and think. There is no doubt that they will ride roughshod over the scheme, abolishing it as soon as they can, but why have they introduced the measure so quickly? Why could they not take some time to examine the implications of abolition? Why are they not consulting? In other areas of government, reviews and consultations appear every 10 minutes, but not on the assisted places scheme.

Why not allow all the children to finish their education, not just to the end of primary, but right up to the end of secondary? The amendments would achieve that, and I hope that the Government will consider them seriously before the Bill starts to affect the lives of children in a way that they will come to regret.

Why not allow schools such as Manchester grammar school more time to take the lead? That school is admirably trying to set up a fund to replace the money that it will lose as a result of the Bill. Only today, the *Evening Standard* reports that some 25 schools of the Girls Public Day School Trust are attempting to get together a fund to cover the 3,000 places in those 25 schools that the Government are casting aside.

[Mrs. Gillan]

Those schools have no time to get together, so 26 schools are effectively working on a scheme and the remainder are being rushed into a timetable which they cannot possibly achieve. If the scheme is to be abolished, it is admirable that those independent schools that have taken part in it should seek an alternative way of providing places for children from low-income families. I strongly recommend that the Government take the amendments seriously. They would provide time to ensure the protection of the education of a future generation of children.

The amendments would allow schemes to be set up properly to provide money at present provided by the assisted places scheme. They would ensure that there were schools of a suitable nature in the state sector to absorb the children who unfortunately would not get an assisted place. In addition, they would give LEAs time to plan for what will be an overwhelming increase in numbers in many areas.

Where will children go if the scheme is abolished and if the schools do not manage to mount a rescue plan? Where will children go who, for example, want to attend a single-sex school or a school of a particular religious denomination? It is important that those questions are answered. We have had no answers, so I presume that the Government have none and so need time to find them.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that any problem involving the availability of places at a denominational school or a single-sex school—caused by the abolition of the assisted places scheme—might mean that a local education authority unintentionally breached the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 or even the Race Relations Act 1976? The Government would have landed that LEA in a legal difficulty that was no fault of its own.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Local education authorities could have some difficulties with equal opportunities legislation. We have received no explanation from the Government, and we are not satisfied that they have even considered those points in their headlong rush to introduce the Bill.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Following on from that point, does my hon. Friend agree that, in some circumstances, it might be more expensive for an LEA to meet its statutory duties—to provide appropriate education for individual children—outside the private sector and the assisted places scheme?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend has much experience in education, and he is right. That is another example of the questions that are raised by the destruction of the scheme that have not been answered by the Government at any stage. I see no evidence that those questions have even been considered by the Government, which is very worrying.

Have the Government considered the effect of the scheme on individuals? I believe that the Government need time to consider that effect. An article in *The Times* outlined the fact that lone parents will be worst hit by the end of the assisted places scheme. That is one of the aspects that worry Conservatives. Single mothers would be among the biggest losers if the scheme were abolished. A survey carried out in October 1996 by—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I am reluctant to interrupt the hon. Lady, but the amendments restrict her to a discussion of the date of operation, not the general matters that she is raising.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank you for your guidance, Mr. Martin. I am seeking to—

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): The hon. Member is filibustering.

Mrs. Gillan: The Secretary of State, from a sedentary position, says that I am filibustering. I am certainly not filibustering. I have never filibustered in my life. [*Laughter.*] Labour Members may laugh, but the record shows that I have never filibustered.

I am trying to point out to the Government that if the amendments are accepted, they will have time to consider the questions that I am raising and they are therefore pertinent to the argument about the delay suggested in the amendments. With your permission, Mr. Martin, I will pursue that line of argument, but I do not intend to take up the time of the Committee—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. It was not so much guidance that I was giving the hon. Lady, but more of an instruction.

Mrs. Gillan: We all like the smack of firm leadership, Mr. Martin.

If the Government accepted the amendments, they would have time to consider the implications for single mothers. In October 1996, the Girls Public Day School Trust carried out a survey that showed that more than a third of those who benefited from the scheme were single parents. Most of the 1,710 families who responded to the survey had low incomes of under £10,000 a year. More than half of the parents in the survey said that they had applied to the scheme because they would like an independent education for their child. They believed that that style of education was best fitted to their child, but they could not afford it themselves. It is single mothers who will suffer from the Bill.

The amendments would give the Government time to consult their supporters. The Government argue that they were swept into power on their manifesto and that they must keep each and every pledge in it. I can admire a political party for that, but I do not admire a Government who bring in legislation with such rapidity that they do not discuss with their supporters who will be affected by the Bill whether it is a good idea. A survey conducted by MORI for the Independent Schools Information Service showed that more than 55 per cent. of Labour party supporters backed the scheme, but the Government have given themselves no time to consult Labour voters—and, probably, Labour party members—who will be affected badly by their proposals.

4.30 pm

The amendments simply ask the Government to pause and reflect. We ask them to take time to consult schools and parents, examine the educational outcomes and the alternative provision—to ensure that the alternative provision is similar to what is currently provided—and talk to local educational authorities, which, after all, will have to bear the burden of the legislation. I have no evidence that the present ministerial team has consulted LEAs about the implications of the Bill.

We need to safeguard the education of all our children. The Government say that they care deeply about education—in fact, it is "education, education, education"—but, instead of taking a responsible attitude to the Bill, they have introduced it with indecent haste. It is a short Bill, but it is far from simple in terms of the effect that it will have. It would be easy to introduce a very short Bill to abolish the House of Commons, but that, too, would not be simple in terms of its outcome.

I ask the Government to take a breathing space and consider how they will approach the legislation in a proper fashion. I believe that many families, including children, will suffer directly as a result of the Bill that they have introduced so abruptly, without examining its implications.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply to the questions that I have raised. I hope that he will be able to give us evidence that adequate consultation has taken place and that he has thought about how he will tackle what will follow the passage of the Bill.

Mr. Don Foster: I do not intend to delay the Committee, but this is clearly a delaying amendment. The Opposition are trying to prevent the speedy passage of a Bill which my party supports, and wants to see on the statute book as quickly as possible. Later in the proceedings, we shall want to probe the Government a little further and suggest some minor amendments to the Bill, but we consider it vital for it to be passed quickly.

We believe that the assisted places scheme has created a two-tier system, that it is divisive and that it did not even succeed in meeting the criteria laid down for it by the previous Administration. As I made clear on Second Reading, we do not oppose the independent schools sector, and would like a much closer relationship between it and the state sector. One of our amendments suggests ways in which that could be achieved.

I rise merely to place clearly on the record the Liberal Democrats' opposition to the assisted places scheme. We want it to be abolished as quickly as possible, so we shall strenuously oppose these amendments.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): I begin by declaring a personal interest in this subject, as my two children attend schools that have a large number of pupils on assisted places. My children are not in receipt of assisted places. The schools are in the constituency of the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster)—my successor as Member for that city—but many of their pupils come from families and households in my constituency and in the rest of Worcestershire.

I am keen that we should give the Government, local education authorities, schools and parents additional time to think about the consequences of this measure, which is why I shall speak so strongly in support of the amendments. I wish that the Government would understand our concerns. They should take advantage of the time that would be given to them if they accepted the amendments, and should reflect on the fact that it is not schools that benefit from the assisted places scheme, but pupils from ordinary families.

During the election campaign, I met many parents who should have been natural Labour voters but who voted Conservative because they wanted to protect the benefits that they receive from the scheme. *[Interruption.]* There is no point in hon. Members scoffing at parents from relatively under-privileged backgrounds and families on low-incomes who want to take advantage of the scheme. They will take such scoffing very seriously and badly.

I urge the Minister to take the opportunity provided by the amendments to rethink his position. There is no doubt that the measure will produce some savings, but they will be modest. The main problem posed by the Bill will be faced by the schools. By delaying its implementation for a year or two, the Government would show that their approach is not dogmatic and that they are prepared to be open-minded and flexible and to govern in the interests of all the people, as they frequently claim.

I believe that Worcester Royal grammar school, which my son attends, should have more time to plan for the serious impact that the changes will have on it. It is not an elitist school: its fees are low. It was in the state sector until 1983, and it has offered an outstanding education to bright boys in Worcestershire from any background for more than 700 years. The Bill will, suddenly and dramatically, severely endanger that process.

A sign could be put up outside the Worcester Royal grammar school saying, "Rich kids only at this school. By order, T. Blair." That is the problem. The school does not want that to happen; it wants to continue to offer an education of quality to bright boys in the county from any background. It wants to raise more money for bursaries and scholarships, so that it can carry on offering those opportunities while the assisted places scheme is being phased out. The amendments would give the school another year or two, which would be of huge benefit in enabling it to do that.

I and many people in Worcestershire want to help the Worcester Royal grammar school, King's school, Alice Ottley school and St. Mary's convent—the four schools in Worcester city—some of whose parents and pupils benefit from the assisted places scheme. We want to give them more time to cope with the serious challenge that this dramatic development will present to them.

The development of new bursaries and scholarships will play a crucial part in ensuring that those schools do not become elitist. I do not want them to be elitist: that would be wrong. As I said, the Worcester Royal grammar school has offered a broadly based education to pupils from any background for more than 700 years. It is crucial that it is allowed to continue to provide that. I hope that the Government will take this group of amendments very seriously.

Ninety per cent. of Worcester Royal grammar school's intake on assisted places comes from maintained primary schools. Those pupils are from ordinary backgrounds. The scheme is not a scam to get rich kids educated on the cheap. It is a genuine attempt to provide a different form of education for a specific group of people who can

[Mr. Peter Luff]

benefit from it. There are some 260 assisted places at the Worcester Royal grammar school. That is a large number. It may be the largest in the west midlands, and that fact has preserved the diverse, non-elitist character of the school. It desperately needs to be given the time that the amendments would provide to enable it to maintain that character.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) urged the Government to seize this opportunity to stop and think about the implications of their policy. I also urge them to seize the opportunity that is presented by the amendments to consider the matter in detail. Even if they wish to press ahead with the abolition of assisted places—as my hon. Friend said, Labour has been committed to that for 18 years; it is one of the few policies on which it has been consistent—they should pause for breath rather than rush helter-skelter into a policy that is born of a misunderstanding of the role of assisted places. Perhaps it is a misunderstanding in good faith, but it is a misunderstanding nevertheless.

By stopping and thinking, the Government would give opportunities to others to do that. Local education authorities need to be able to plan for the increase in the number of pupils in maintained schools. Some of Worcestershire's schools are full. The sixth-form college in Worcester, which is outside the LEA sector and has separate status, will face a severe increase in demand because the schools offering assisted places are the only schools in the city with sixth forms. Children who will no longer be able to go to those schools will have to go to the sixth-form college, and some will go to the technical college. The sixth-form college is already bursting at the seams and unable to cope with the current number of pupils. It desperately needs time to develop increased facilities and improved buildings to enable it to cope with the large increase.

By considering the amendments favourably and not treating them as a cynical attempt to wreck the Bill, the Government would be doing those institutions a great favour. They would also be conferring a great favour on parents who have one child in an assisted place and hope later to send its sibling to the same school. Those parents will now face difficult decisions about different educations and logistics, and those decisions will be forced on them because they will have children at different schools when they had every reason to expect that they would be at the same school. Of course, delay would enable some parents to take advantage of the scheme for a year or two and perhaps not face those consequences at all.

I accept the Government's sincerity. They think that it is wrong to pay extra to educate children in the independent rather than the state sector. The Government have their sums wrong. I would not be surprised to find that, because of the low fees that are charged by the schools in Worcester city which the children of my constituents attend on assisted places, there would be no saving at all as a result of abolishing assisted places.

If the Government took a little time to look at each area, they might take a different view. They might reach the compromise of limiting the total amount payable under the assisted places scheme to a sum approaching the per-pupil SSA formula figure for that LEA area. That would mean that the assisted places scheme would remain, and disruption would be avoided. Savings would also result, because the difference in the two figures would be available to the Treasury. I suspect that my constituents who use those schools would still be able to take advantage of the scheme without the adverse knock-on consequences for the rest of the education sector in Worcestershire.

I offer that thought to the Government, although I do not like it. It is an unattractive solution, but if I shared the Government's objectives I should think about it. If they accepted the amendments, they would have time to consider such a scheme and it would deliver the same modest savings without the adverse consequences that I have described.

The amendments would also enable the Government to rethink their arithmetic on the scheme. I do not think that they have done that because they cannot fund their pledge on class sizes and bring about abolition. If they gave themselves a few months to sit down at the Treasury and work that out, the facts would stare them in the face. I urge the Government to give themselves an extra year by accepting the amendments, and to look at the figures in detail.

I understand that the savings from the scheme after phasing and at the end of seven years will be about £268 million. The cost of educating pupils who can no longer go to independent schools and of meeting the pledge on class sizes will be at least £418 million. That is a deficit of £150 million. Therefore, if the class size pledge is met it will put £150 million on the Government's public expenditure total. That is not a huge deficit, but it will not be welcomed by the Chancellor, who is trying to meet his tight public expenditure commitments.

4.45 pm

Independent estimates put the amount much higher than £150 million. I have heard the figure of £250 million mentioned on the basis of good authoritative research. The Government should look again at their figures and pause for breath, as the amendments would allow them to do, and think in detail about the scheme's implications for their objectives.

Acceptance of the amendments would also give the Government time to reflect on how to achieve their class size reduction vis-a-vis the phasing of the savings from the scheme. Initially, the savings will be modest. I give the Government credit for not rushing precipitately into abolition in September. I thank them for that because such timing would place a huge burden on schools and parents and would have caused complete chaos as parents scrambled for places elsewhere.

The consequences of the Government's timing are that there will be no savings at all this year. Only in the first year after the phasing out will there be a saving of about £13 million. I understand that at the peak the Government will save about £49 million a year. Therefore, these sums become available only slowly. How will the Government reconcile such phased savings with their class size objective? They need time to think about that, and the conclusion that they will have to reach is that they will need to go into the public expenditure pot more generally. I urge them to seize the opportunity that the amendments present.

The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), who is no longer in his place, made an important point about the need to maintain good relations between the independent and state sectors. One of the chief attractions of the assisted places scheme is that it has done precisely that. It has blurred the edges between the two systems and has prevented the sharp demarcation of "them" and "us" in education. It has made for better relationships between the two sectors. If the Government propose to press ahead with abolition of the assisted places scheme they will have to think about how those relationships can be maintained. I understand that Liberal Democrat Members may have some suggestions on that later in the debate.

We do not want ghettos of excellence in the independent sector that are entirely isolated from the rest of the education system. I was educated in a maintained grammar school that was very like Worcester Royal grammar school. Sadly, the drive to comprehensivisation drove Worcester Royal out of the state sector and into the independent sector against its wishes. I agree with any clever researcher sitting behind the Ministers who may say that it was a Conservative county council which voted for the transfer to comprehensive education in Worcestershire—more is the pity. That was done because of the great pressure of conventional educational wisdom at the time.

A sharp divide was introduced between the independent and state sectors, and that need not have been so. I deplore the fact that schools were forced to transfer across the boundary. I ask the Government to be open minded, original and thoughtful and to respond constructively to the amendments. They should say, "Yes, another year or so would help us to think about these issues in more detail." I am sure that they will say that they are still committed to the abolition of the assisted places scheme and I accept that, although I regret it. It is a fact which I shall have to live with. I again urge the Government to stop and think.

Mr. Boswell: I, too, support the amendment, to which my hon. Friends the Members for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) and for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) have spoken so eloquently. I do not think that I need to speak quite at the same length.

I should properly begin by declaring a personal interest in that, until last year, one of my daughters attended a school that availed itself of the assisted places scheme—although few hon. Members' children would qualify for an assisted place, and mine did not.

I put it strongly to the Government that the problem with their proposals—a problem that was identified in the Second Reading debate, in which I did not participate, is that the savings from them are very small. Savings would be made only if they were achieved on the basis of an average cost of funding the places. They would be very small, if not negative, if achieved on the basis of a marginal cost, yet moving such a number of children from the private to the state-maintained sector would have to be secured at a marginal cost. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Worcestershire said, the savings would build up over time and would be tiny at the beginning. There is therefore a premium on proper planning. It would be sensible if the Government took time within their political pledge and their mandate, if they so regard it.

The Government should in particular consider the position of local education authorities because they need time to plan for the reprovision of places and the capital costs that may apply, especially in cities such as Worcester, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Worcestershire had the honour to represent, where there is a high concentration of independent schools that offer assisted places.

I see that my hon. Friend's successor, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), has just joined the debate. I know of his interest—which we all share—in education. If the Government want to do a good job by LEAs, they should take time to enable them to plan. Capital costs can be more easily accommodated over a planning period than they can if rushed into in an emergency to meet the duty to educate in the maintained sector.

Having said that, I am more generally conscious of the Bill's impact on education. We must consider the impact on not only institutions and authorities but individuals and the institutions that deliver education. Some of the impact on individuals—families and the children concerned—may be more properly explored in debates on subsequent amendments. I merely flag up my concern now, and I may wish to comment on those matters later.

I would very much like Ministers to consider the institutional impact in a couple of respects. The first is on the schools themselves. The impact is all very well in schools where there is a small minority of assisted places—2 per cent. is being quoted as the lowest participant—but very different for schools that offer 40 to 50 per cent. of their places under the assisted places scheme. There is a risk of destabilising good schools, making them unviable or facing them with some most unpalatable planning options in coping with the new situation. Time to think, plan and make alternative arrangements will soften that impact.

The second and more important impact goes to the heart of what my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Worcestershire said about the division between private and state sectors. Wherever we were educated, many of us were distressed by the outcome in practice of the move to comprehensivisation in the 1960s and 1970s. The move, it was argued, was so conceived as to try to bring children together, but actually succeeded in driving the sectors apart—not by destroying the private sector but by making it more exclusive and, to some extent, more remote from the state sector.

Providing time, within the context of policies for which the Government have a mandate, would enable the independent sector, especially schools offering assisted places, to plan and cope with the change. Of course, many of them, especially the strongest academically and those with the lowest participation in assisted places, could easily float through. They could go on being very successful independent schools almost as if nothing had happened, but something would have happened: the mix of the socio-economic base that had participated in the schools, from which, for example, my daughter benefited indirectly, would come to an end. Incidentally, my daughter never encountered any discrimination between the various children. I do not think that anybody knew who was on an assisted place or not. Ending such a mix would be wrong. I pray in aid George Walden, the former Member for Buckingham, who wrote most eloquently on the dangers of dividing those two sectors of education.

It would be much better to look at ways in which we can use the time set out in the amendment to enable schools, either individually or collectively, to try to

[Mr. Boswell]

hammer out some arrangements so that they can obtain the social advantages of integration without the scheme to whose abolition the Government are committed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham has already mentioned that the Girls Public Day School Trust is considering the possibility of providing bursaries. That is very welcome. It is a strong organisation, of which I have a good deal of experience. Providing such bursaries may be more difficult for individual schools. Would it not be worth considering at, say, the average cost in the maintained sector, enabling a scheme to be set up whereby schools could offer bursaries with a state contribution—not over the odds or at excess cost but at equivalent cost—which could be used on condition that it levered in contributions from the private sector?

Such contributions to provide funds to support integration in education might come from one or two sources. One might be a charitable or, as it were, altruistic source. The Government might also consider whether it was possible—my experience is that to a very small extent it is—to top-slice the fees of fee-paying parents. I would not want to speculate on a figure, but if it were possible to raise some money through the school to provide bursaries—I suspect that many schools would want to do so anyway—and the Government were prepared to produce some viable scheme, they could achieve their social objective of ensuring that relatively affluent parents such as—let us make no bones about it—me and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire, were chipping in to obtain the benefits of the integration that we all want.

I clearly remember the Secretary of State for Education and Employment enunciating on Second Reading his commitment to a greater partnership between the state and the private sector. The amendment centres on the need to find practical ways in which to advance such partnership. If the assisted places scheme is no longer acceptable to the Government, it is incumbent on them to take the time to enable those who are working in the sector to work out practical solutions which can no longer be in the same form but which deliver the same benefits. For that reason, I strongly support the amendment.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I strongly support the amendment. I make the same declaration as my hon. Friends. My principle concern is that assisted places are of great benefit to many of my constituents. I probably have as many, if not more, children who have taken up assisted places in my constituency than in any other constituency—400 from low-income families. My constituents would want me to support the amendment because the longer that the scheme remains in place, the longer such opportunities are available for future generations of parents and children. The benefits are real.

There is no deficiency in any way in the maintained sector in my constituency. We have secondary schools that perform with considerable distinction and have been given national recognition for what they have achieved. They offer a high quality of education and do well by any objective measure of performance.

The schools to which the assisted places children go are of national, if not international, importance, and offer an extremely high quality of academic education. Most of the assisted places in my constituency are at the Haberdashers' Aske's school, which has 230 assisted places out of a total of 1,300 places at the school. I know that this is of interest to the Minister because he once did some analysis of the assisted places scheme, and he included Haberdashers' Aske's in a list of schools that he said were receiving a subsidy from the assisted places scheme.

That is an interesting idea of what constitutes a subsidy, because I understand from the headmaster of that school that there are 450 applicants for 100 places. Of course, the school could fill the places occupied by children with assisted places many times over with parents paying full fees. It is not in any way, shape or form a subsidy for the school. It is a subsidy for the parents and children who would not otherwise be able to enjoy those opportunities.

5 pm

Mr. Lidington: I am sure that my hon. Friend will not mind me reminding him that when the direct grant was withdrawn from Haberdashers' Aske's and other schools by a previous Labour Government, the school had no trouble recruiting more than enough pupils to fill every place available several times over. The big difference was that those places could, in those new circumstances, be made available only to children of well-to-do parents. If the school, as well as the parents, were opposed to those changes—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. That intervention is far too long. Also, the amendment is about the date of operation, not the qualities of a school or what children it is prepared to take in. We must talk about the date of operation.

Mr. Clappison: In spite of the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) may have been slightly out of order, he is a great advertisement for that school.

My point is that, the longer the scheme remains in operation, the longer the opportunities will be available for children in my constituency. I am trying to counter the argument that has been advanced by the Government many times, which is that perfectly good opportunities are available at other schools. I will not go into further detail about schools in my constituency except to say that Haberdashers' Aske's school for girls—I do not wish to be sexist—offers an equally high quality of education and is equally highly oversubscribed. There are other very good schools such as St. Margaret's in Bushey and Aldenham school.

Labour Members will be interested to know that, not far from my constituency, there are other independent schools offering a high-quality of education such as St. Alban's high school for girls and Haileybury school. Labour Members will be interested to know that, until recently, Haileybury was the only public school to have educated a Labour Prime Minister. I am not sure that that Prime Minister, Earl Attlee, would have been in favour of the proposal. My understanding is that the founding fathers of the Labour party and the early Labour Ministers and Prime Ministers were in favour of throwing open the doors of great institutions and providing opportunities for members of the lower-income classes.

The Government's justification for phasing out the assisted places scheme within this time scale is that they want the money to reduce the class sizes of five, six and

seven-year-olds. I do not want to go into the argument about the validity of the assumption about class sizes, but the Minister's interpretation of the Ofsted report in his reply on Second Reading was interesting. He said that the Ofsted inspector had conducted an analysis of class sizes and was in favour of smaller classes. The Minister gave that as the principal justification for the Bill, but it is based upon an ambitious interpretation of the report. I note that the press release for the Ofsted report states:

"Ofsted finds no clear link between class size and lesson quality."

If the Minister examines carefully the conclusions of that report, particularly paragraphs 90 and 91, he will find that it states:

"The main finding of the Report, that reductions in class size do not necessarily lead to better teaching and higher standards, suggests, however, that schools should not automatically seek to use new resources to reduce class size."

The report recognises that, where the resources are used to reduce class sizes, it is most appropriate to do that for children of earlier ages, but it does not come to the conclusion that that is necessarily the most effective way to spend the money. In fact, it seems to point in the opposite direction and suggest that it is more important to look at other things such as teacher quality and performance.

I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to say a little about the financial justification for the early phasing out. We are told that, the sooner the assisted places scheme is phased out, the sooner the Government can spend the money on reducing class sizes. I remind the Minister of the promise made by Labour in its manifesto. It is the basis on which the Government have put the Bill before the House and the basis on which the Labour party went to the country. It says:

"We will reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds to 30 or under, by phasing out the assisted places scheme, the cost of which is set to rise to £180 million per year."

In other words, the Labour party was putting this forward as a straightforward reallocation of resources which would be sufficient to pay for reducing class sizes. Anybody who read that might have taken a different view if they had been told at the same time, "By the way, we do not think that enough money will be raised by phasing out the assisted places scheme, and we will have to reallocate money from other things as well." The Minister will be well aware that the Government have pledged to stay within education spending targets for his Department so that any other money being used to reduce class sizes would have to come from somewhere else such as secondary or higher education. The Minister is trapped within that straitjacket. That puts a different complexion on the Government's promise.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will my hon Friend reflect on the fact that a delay of three years in the implementation of the Bill would give the Government an opportunity to plan public expenditure properly beyond the ambit of the present planning timetable?

Mr. Clappison: That is an important point, and many of my constituents would agree with it.

I want the Minister to tell us whether he still maintains that the savings from the assisted places scheme will be sufficient in themselves to pay for the reduction in class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. He seemed to be tip-toeing away from that proposition in his reply to the debate on Second Reading. I should like him to address that question specifically and say whether, in his view, the savings will be sufficient.

We have been told by the Government that they estimate that £100 million will be saved by 2000 by phasing out the assisted places scheme. That is the justification for the early phasing out. We have yet to know from the Government what will be the cost of reducing class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. I asked the Government that in a written question and, in view of what was said earlier, I feel quite honoured because I have had an answer. However, I was told that the Government do not have a clue what the cost will be, so I was not much better informed.

Mr. Boswell: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have been silent on any mechanism by which they can enforce the reduction of class sizes because there is no such mechanism in the local government finance settlement?

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. We must keep to the terms of the amendment. Class size reductions and other matters are for other amendments. We must keep to the date of operation. If hon. Members are exhausting the argument, the thing to do is to dispose of this amendment and move on to something else.

Mr. Clappison: I am bound by your ruling, Mr. Martin, but I would like the Government to deal with the question of the early phasing out and what resources it will make available. I ask the Minister that specific question, because my constituents will be interested in his answer. They have been told that they will have to sacrifice the assisted places that offer them so many opportunities, so that reductions in class sizes can be made in the manner described by the Government.

Mr. Lansley: In South Cambridgeshire, the constituency which I am privileged to represent, we have a number of schools with assisted places. It would be very much to the benefit of parents who have children in assisted places in those schools if the Committee passed this group of amendments, thereby delaying by three years the coming into operation of the Bill.

There would be several benefits in such a delay. The first—which I hope that we shall discuss in greater detail—is that a three-year delay would significantly reduce the number of siblings of students in assisted places who would not be able to follow their older brothers or sisters to the same school. Moreover, parents would not be placed in the invidious and often very inconvenient and costly position of placing children in a different school, which may have a different ethos, orientation or geographical location.

St. Mary's school, in South Cambridgeshire, illustrates the second reason why delay would be advantageous. It is the only school available to parents in my constituency who want their children to be educated in a single-sex school—in this example, a girls' school—with a Catholic orientation. If assisted places were not available at St. Mary's for parents who want to send their children to a Catholic school in the maintained sector, no other school with the same character would be available.

[Mr. Lansley]

It may not be possible, even if the Committee were to accept the additional delay proposed by this group of amendments, for the maintained sector to provide the same types of diversity. It is very unlikely, however, that the grant-maintained sector—or the voluntary-aided sector, in the case of St. Mary's—would be able to provide the same types of diversity in the time allowed by the Bill. A three-year delay, which may seem extravagant to some people, is not a long period in which to change a school's character, orientation and its ability to offer additional places offering a specific type of education, thereby enabling parents to make a choice.

The third reason why there should be greater delay in implementing the Bill's provisions is that parents with children in assisted places hold considerable expectations that their children will be able to keep those places until they finish their education. Parents of children at St. Faith's school, which is in my constituency, have such an expectation. St. Faith's and the Leys school are linked and are essentially the same school, holding the same charity number, and children at St. Faith's who are almost 11 had a reasonable expectation of continuing their education in assisted places, at the Leys school, until they reached 18. Under the Bill's current provisions, however, they would lose that place in the year in which they were 10 years and six months. That not only denies their reasonable expectation of continuing their education in an assisted place to the age of 18 but curtails their expectation of continuing at St. Faith's, which educates children to the age of 13.

5.15 pm

Delaying the implementation of the Bill by three years would enable a significant proportion of children in assisted places at St. Faith's to complete their education at that school. Delay would not fulfil the reasonable expectations parents had when their children first took up a place in an assisted places school, but it would at least give parents an opportunity to plan ahead to their children's education at 13, when, through common entrance examinations, they would be able to take places elsewhere.

The Department for Education and Employment dispatched a letter to schools with assisted places, in which Ministers made it perfectly clear that parents with children in assisted places who expected to continue their education in the same school until age 13 were to be disappointed. A particular grievance of the parents and schools who will be affected is that, on 1 April 1997, the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service—who was then Labour's schools spokesman—wrote to the chairman of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools, stating that places would be honoured until age 13. The letter from the Department, however, writes that support would be extended

"to ease integration into the maintained sector in those areas where the normal age of transfer is later than age 11."

That will deny children's reasonable expectations.

Conservative Members have already mentioned the fourth reason for delay, but I should like to elaborate on it. In the maintained sector, it is difficult to plan the transfer of pupils from the independent sector and assisted places into the maintained sector. Moreover, I suspect that the Government have little information about where parents with children in assisted places would like to send them in the maintained sector.

During the general election campaign, I visited St. Mary's school and talked to many children in assisted places who were doing extremely well under the scheme. I asked them which school their parents would like them to attend if they did not have an assisted place. In many cases, they said that, because of their parents' desire for them to attend a single-sex school, the alternative would not have been the school closest to their homes but perhaps the Herts and Essex high school, in Bishop's Stortford, which is a considerable distance from their homes.

It does not automatically follow that local education authorities in areas with assisted places will be the authorities that provide places for children leaving assisted places. It is therefore very important that hon. Members are given time to learn what choices parents will have, where parents are likely to send their children and where additional places will be provided.

The Government make much of surplus places, but those places may not be in the areas to which parents want to send their children. It is regrettable if the Government were proposing that parents of children on assisted places should be required to send their children to schools with surplus places, because those parents have the same rights of choice as other parents. There may therefore be additional pressure on currently over-subscribed schools—which brings me back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), that there may be implications not only for revenue expenditure but for capital expenditure in the maintained sector.

The final reason for delay is that the Government do not have a formula for distributing the resources that would be released from abolition of the assisted places scheme. They have not consulted on any such formula, and there are considerable reservations and concerns among schools in my constituency about how that aspect of abolition will be implemented. It may well be that the released resources will be relatively small compared to overall resources in the education budget.

When the Minister was on the "Today" programme, he referred to this Bill as the reduction of class sizes Bill. If the additional resources are to be released only where schools have class sizes in excess of 30 pupil, the Government may miss out on what is, in the judgment of schools and education authorities, the most educationally advantageous distribution of resources.

In South Cambridgeshire, for example, some schools that have about 30 pupils in a class are able to maintain a high standard of education, despite the difficult circumstances. They struggle under less difficult circumstances than some village and rural schools that might not have 30 children in a class, but have to deal with more than one age in a class. Children of five, six, seven and even eight are together in one class.

We surely all recognise that, in those circumstances, it is important to give teachers the opportunity to have classes in which they can undertake differentiated teaching relevant not only to different abilities, but to different ages. A mature judgment may be that, in educational terms and for the benefit of children, it is sometimes better to make greater resources available to

village schools that have to deal with different ages and abilities in the same classroom, rather than to focus on the limited aspect of the absolute number of children in a particular class. That is especially true in South Cambridgeshire, which combines the urban schools of Cambridge city and the village schools beyond.

Those are all good reasons for delay, but they are reasons that the Government do not appear to have taken into consideration. That shows the undue and unreasonable haste with which the Government are trying to push through the Bill before any of the questions have been adequately answered.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). It is clear that he has a good grasp of the education sector.

I should be grateful to know, Mr. Martin, whether you expect me to keep strictly to the group of amendments, or whether you will allow a wider debate now and then a short debate on clause stand part. I shall temper my remarks according to your advice.

The First Deputy Chairman: I should not have to educate hon. Members on procedure—they should know the rules before they participate in the Committee. The amendments are clearly laid down and are restricted to certain matters. The hon. Gentleman should speak to them. If he is out of order, I shall soon tell him so.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Thank you for that guidance, Mr. Martin; it is most helpful.

A great deal has already been said on this group of amendments, so I shall make just three brief points—first, the financial effect of the Bill; secondly, the disruption for the pupils involves; and, thirdly, the effect on the viability of the independent schools.

I want to deal, first, with the general principle of the Bill in regard to the savings from the abolition of the assisted places scheme and the cost of reducing class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. The amendments make a great deal of sense. I do not believe that, under the proposed timetable, the Government have correctly assessed the financial effect on the public expenditure round. The are a number of points about that, some of which have already been made and some which have not.

I do not believe that the savings from the abolition of the scheme will be £100 million; I think that they will be a great deal less. Furthermore, I believe that the cost of reducing class sizes will greatly outweigh any savings. As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said, the marginal cost of establishing extra places in the maintained sector can be very great. For example, if a new building is needed to house two, three or even a dozen additional pupils, the cost could be high. It would be slightly less in revenue costs if a new teacher had to be employed.

I wonder whether the Government have done their sums correctly. The Institute of Public Finance says that the net cost of reducing class sizes—over and above the savings from abolishing the assisted places scheme—will be about £150 million, and that assumes that the Government's savings estimate of £100 million is correct. Therefore, it makes a great deal of sense to delay the implementation of the Bill on financial grounds, if on no others.

Secondly, to minimise the disruption for pupils it would be sensible to allow all pupils currently involved in the scheme to finish their education at the schools they attend. It is dogma to take pupils away from their schools in the middle of their education and move them to different schools. Anyone who has been involved in that exercise, as I was when I was adopted as a prospective parliamentary candidate, knows that changing children from one school to another is disruptive. However bright the child, it sets back his or her progress in the new school. Therefore, I urge that the amendments are accepted so that disruption can be avoided.

My third brief point—before you call me to order, Mr. Martin—relates to the viability of the private sector schools that will be affected. In every one of the five years that I have been a Member of Parliament, I have tried to persuade my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) that St. Edward's school—an excellent school in my constituency—was up to the required standard to qualify for the scheme. I was always told that there were many more schools applying for places than there was finance, or even Government inclination to provide.

However, I was finally able to persuade my hon. Friend. The school has made huge improvements in its standards and has now been granted a number of assisted places, which will be removed in the next year or so. There should be a special concession for schools that have just been brought into the scheme—

Mr. Don Foster: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that, without assisted places money, some independent schools would no longer be viable? If so, it is in marked contradiction to the previous Government's stated view.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman has referred to the third of my categories, so perhaps he will be patient and listen.

I ask the Minister to consider whether some extension could be given to schools that have joined the scheme in the last year so that they have time to replan their finances.

My answer to the point made by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) is that obviously schools that have a block of pupils and a block of finance withdrawn will experience disruption. Any school—from Eton downwards—will suffer from that. For some smaller schools, the withdrawal of pupils and finance could threaten their viability because a number of factors affecting private schools have come into play in recent years.

The general economic climate during the recession severely affected many private schools. Some of the more successful schools have gone out into the world and marketed themselves not just in this country but abroad and have successfully rebuilt their pupil numbers. Other schools, however, are still struggling and the Government should allow them more time to find other forms of finance.

It has already been said that a certain body may be prepared to establish scholarships for private schools. The Labour party, with its financial hat on, thinks that the cost of educating assisted places pupils is higher than the cost in the maintained sector. That is not necessarily the case. The average cost of an assisted place in the scheme is

[Mr. Clifton-Brown]

£3,900. The average cost in many secondary schools in London and elsewhere is higher than that, so the strict financial argument does not necessarily make sense. That aside, it is reasonable to allow the private institutions time to reorganise their finances. There are a number of possible sources of finance that they could tap, including establishing scholarships and sponsorship from industry or special research establishments. No doubt they could think of many more.

There is a good case for accepting these reasonable amendments. I hope that the Government will consider them sensibly.

5.30 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I echo the arguments of my hon. Friends for a delay in the implementation of the Bill. I should genuinely like to be constructive and help the Government, to pick up on a point alluded to by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley).

In opposition and during the election campaign, the Labour party always linked the abolition of the assisted places scheme with a reduction in primary school class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. If the Bill is passed under the current timetable, parents will see the abolition of the assisted places scheme, but no reduction in primary school class sizes. The Government will find it difficult to manage the expectations of those parents. I understand that the Minister for School Standards has described the Bill as the reduction in class sizes Bill. Parents will ask, "Why, when you have removed the assisted places scheme, is my child still in a class of 32, 33 or 34? You said that you were going to reduce class sizes. Why is that not happening?"

It is in the Government's interests to take time to stop and think about the proper implementation of every aspect of the Bill, as my hon. Friends have argued, including the reduction in class sizes. What will the mechanism be for that? How will it be achieved? How will local education authorities be encouraged to carry out the Government's aim? Many other issues relate to that, including appeals bodies and popular schools. It is in the Government's interests to delay implementation and use the time to stop and think. When they put the measure through they can ensure that both sides of the policy come into effect at the same time, not one without the other. That would also be in the interests of parents.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I am impressed by my hon. Friend's genuine attempt to help the Government, which demonstrates her generosity of spirit. She is asking the Government to stop and think about this important issue, but does she have any reason to suppose, given the Government's track record to date, that they are likely to stop and think about anything, let alone this issue?

Mrs. May: I thank my hon. Friend for that interruption. *[Interruption.]* Sorry, intervention. Sitting down for the first time in the House is always risky. I am afraid that I have little expectation that the Government will listen to my advice because so far they have shown a remarkable reluctance to stop and think about any of their measures. Rather, they are showing arrogance in pushing through measures without thinking thoroughly about their practical implications. That is a real concern not just to hon. Members, but to local education authorities, teachers, parents and children, who will suffer from the measure being passed hastily, as is proposed.

I should also like to pick up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff). Another reason for delay is the real need to ensure that local education authorities can plan properly for the increased number of children that they will have to accommodate in their schools. When I was a local councillor—I am sure that this experience is shared by hon. Members who have been local councillors—a frequent complaint, particularly on the education committee, was that the Government did not give councillors sufficient time to think through and plan for changes.

The Labour councillors on my education committee told me not to worry, because everything would be all right under a Labour Government. How wrong they were. The Government are pushing legislation through arrogantly without properly considering the implications for local education authorities. I urge the Government to take time, stop and think, and show good faith with local councillors.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is making a valuable point. She may know that the Government have said that existing surplus places will be filled by the children leaving the assisted places scheme. Does she agree that it is important in her area, as it is in mine, to see whether the surplus places match up to where the assisted places are? In my Hertfordshire constituency, most secondary schools are bulging at the seams.

Mrs. May: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He is right. Having been involved in an education authority, I know that one of the greatest problems is matching where parents want their children to go to school and where there are surplus places. It is imperative that local education authorities are given time to plan properly, to assess the impact and to ensure that they can continue to provide parental choice to the extent that we want.

My final point ties in with the problems of planning for local authorities. Local social services departments, as well as local education authorities, will have to prepare for the implementation of the Bill. I do not think that the Government have properly considered that. I urge them to accept the proposals for delay so that they can do that. Some children are helped by the assisted places scheme to have boarding school education because of genuine social difficulties or problematic family backgrounds. I have spoken to the chairman of one of the charitable foundations that makes use of the scheme to help children from families with such difficulties to have boarding school education. He said to me, "I mind if the assisted places scheme goes, because I mind about the children."

I understand that those foundations were having constructive discussions before the election with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). They have also made representations to the Minister about the problem, encouraging him to find a way of continuing to allow such children to be provided with boarding school education even if the assisted places scheme is to go.

I urge the Minister to think about those children in genuine social need. They must find a way to provide for them. That cannot be done with the current timetable. The Government must stop and think, accept the amendments and give themselves time to work with the private sector and the charitable foundations to find a way to help children in genuine need. If the Government do not accept the amendments, they will turn their backs on those children.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) made a forceful speech, putting her points very well. I, too, find it astonishing that the Government are pressing ahead with such undue haste. Their proposals for reductions in class sizes, intended as a consequence of the Bill, appear to be muddled and ill thought out.

It is incredible that the Government have so far given no convincing explanation of why they are determined to override the provisions for delay in existing legislation. Schedule 35 of the Education Act 1996 says:

"The proprietors of the school may terminate a participation agreement by giving three years' written notice to the Secretary of State"

and that Secretary of State may do the same with the same period of notice. Those arrangements are there for a good reason. The school taking part in the assisted places scheme, the families involved and the maintained schools that might have to take in additional children when assisted places are no longer available need time to adjust. For the Government to press ahead so precipitately only makes life much more difficult for the families and organisations most directly involved.

We know from the helpful note published by the Library something about the distribution of assisted places among education authorities across the kingdom. However, we do not know how many pupils each local education authority is likely to have to deal with as a consequence of the Government's proposals. The Government owe it to LEAs to allow a period of delay, as proposed in the amendment, so that LEAs can see how their areas will be affected and then make proposals to furnish adequate education for the additional pupils with whom they will be expected to cope.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that the uneven distribution of the assisted places, in addition to the possible problems of population expansion in certain areas, will put severe strain on LEAs? Hampshire, for example, has 1,500 children on the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend makes a very telling point. It is true that areas such as Hampshire and south Hertfordshire—my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) referred to the latter—and, I suspect, Cheshire on the fringes of the Greater Manchester conurbation, are likely to experience severe problems in providing educational accommodation for pupils displaced from the assisted places scheme.

We know from studies undertaken by the Institute of Public Finance that the savings claimed by the Government are pretty bogus. Indeed, even Ministers are now very half-hearted in their defence of the arithmetic that they put to the electorate in recent weeks. However, I shall focus on the likely capital cost of the abolition of the assisted places scheme—a matter that is very pertinent to the amendments that call for a delay in the implementation of the proposals.

The Institute of Public Finance has estimated that cost as approximately £100 million. Of course, we have no idea how the capital cost would be spread among the various local education authorities, and one compelling reason for urging delay is to give the Government time, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead said, to consult local education authorities so that the apportionment of the capital costs can be properly calculated.

We all know from our constituency experience that when a local education authority talks about the need to provide extra school places, it is not simply a matter of passing a resolution in the education committee. The LEA has to seek borrowing approval from the Department for Education and Employment, and that can take quite a long time. It also needs to seek planning permission from the appropriate planning authority.

Mr. Boswell: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that a number of legal procedures must be gone through, which in my experience in the Department are often very protracted? I am thinking of, for example, the setting of the maximum admission number. Such matters have to be properly sorted out.

5.45 pm

Mr. Lidington: That is another extremely valid point, which again shows how ill prepared Ministers have been in trying to rush the scheme so precipitately.

Before my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) intervened, I was talking about the need to seek planning permission. My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham and I know of schools in our county that are located in the middle of the green belt. The planning authorities are very cautious about allowing the construction of extra school buildings because they wish to keep those areas as green as possible. Other schools in my constituency are heavily oversubscribed but are in urban areas where it would be difficult to find extra land on which to put new classrooms or laboratories without severely reducing the space available for playing fields or for other activities integral to the life of the schools.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): My hon. Friend and other colleagues have referred to the final report of the Institute of Public Finance on the cost of reducing class sizes, but no one has yet got down to the specific net cost of doing so, taking into account the capital and revenue cost. We have to add the two together and consider the net cost over time and the on-going cost thereafter. It is significant that in the first five years of the proposals being in operation, the average net cost, taking into account all the savings resulting from the abolition of the assisted places scheme, is on average £45 million a year and thereafter £16 million a year ad infinitum. That is something that the Government have not taken into account but which they should.

Mr. Lidington: I am sure that my hon. Friend is correct when he says that the Government have not taken that into account. Another reason for urging delay is to allow Ministers time to take advice and consult their colleagues

[Mr. Lidington]

in other Departments, most notably the Treasury, on how they can possibly deal with the problems that my hon. Friend highlights.

Mr. Colvin: I should perhaps have mentioned in my previous intervention that the data on which the figures are based come from the Department for Education and Employment, although the report was commissioned by independent schools. The figures have not been conjured up out of the air to support a particular case; they are the Government's own figures.

Mr. Lidington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That suggests that perhaps Ministers were not ignorant after all of the consequences of rushing the proposal but that they are rather shy of explaining in detail to the House how they propose to deal with the consequences of their policy.

I referred earlier to the delays caused to local authorities' providing extra classrooms by the need to seek planning permission. Of course, that is only the first hurdle. Applications may go to appeal, which leads to further delay. LEAs then have to seek tenders and appoint contractors; only then would building begin. I suspect that there would be at least a couple of years between a local authority realising that the abolition of the assisted places scheme required it to provide additional classrooms in particular schools and that LEA being in a position to bring those classrooms on stream to accommodate the additional pupils. That is yet another reason for the Government to reflect and take advantage of the delay that the amendment would allow them.

The Bill's impact would not be restricted to LEAs. Another important reason for allowing a period for thought is, as one or two of my hon. Friends have suggested, to allow schools that at present participate in the assisted places scheme to launch appeals to raise money for bursaries to enable the academically gifted children who can currently take advantage of the scheme to continue to benefit from the education in those schools.

I know from my experience and my conversations with the head teachers of some of the schools that they are, in the main, wholly committed to allowing greater access to the sort of education that they can provide at their independent schools to pupils from a wide variety of backgrounds. It is a matter of great regret that the Government, rather than seeking a new dialogue with the independent sector and rather than trying to find ways in which to enhance that partnership and create more places in independent schools for pupils from relatively poor families, should instead try to knock down the ladder and deny those opportunities. That strikes me as dogma triumphing over education common sense.

The third reason for delay is to allow pupils, parents and schools to know in detail what the Government propose for them in the immediate future. Later tonight I am sure that we will have the opportunity during our debates on clause 3 to discuss the arrangements for the regulations that the Government propose. The amendments to those proposed regulations are relevant. As the Bill is presented to us, Parliament is being asked to approve the abolition of the assisted places scheme and to give the Government an enabling power to introduce transitional regulations to deal with pupils who currently benefit from assisted places without Parliament having sight of those regulations, even in draft form.

I recall attending various Standing Committees in the previous Parliament where Labour Member after Labour Member rose in his place to say that it was disgraceful that there should be any thought of giving a Minister the power to act through secondary legislation without that legislation being available, at least in draft form, for the Standing Committee to examine and debate. I hope that the Government will be prepared, even now, to accept the opportunity for reflection that the amendments provide and to introduce draft regulations so that Parliament can consider them alongside the Bill. That strikes me as being only fair to the schools, parents and pupils.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Conservative Members have advanced many compelling arguments as to why there should be a delay in implementation. The most compelling arguments, and those to which I should like to return, relate to the simple human consequences of the Bill. There is a mismatch in what the Government are setting out and there is something missing from the logic of their proposals. They say that they wish to remove the assisted places scheme and, instead, reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, but there is no correlation between the benefits that may be achieved by the one action and the damage done by the other.

I am concerned that, by removing assisted places for children, whatever their age and whatever their stage in the educational process, the Government are taking something away and not replacing it. I speak as someone who is fortunate enough to represent a constituency with good schools. Pupils from my constituency who go to independent schools on assisted places—mostly in Manchester—do so, unless they have specific religious or other reasons, mainly through choice rather than necessity. If those places did not exist, and provided there was an increase in the number of places available at the schools in my constituency, those pupils would not lose out too much, but that, of itself, raises a major concern.

Many of the excellent schools in my constituency—the grammar schools and the high schools, many of which are grant-maintained—have asked for funding to increase their size so that they can take more pupils. They are already bursting at the seams and the proposal to remove assisted places will result in increased demand for places at them. What is proposed will not provide any further capital funding for the expansion of those schools or necessarily provide more places in terms of teaching capacity in secondary schools. There is a mismatch within the proposals, and we need more time for consideration.

I am thinking particularly of pupils who do not live in my constituency. We are on the fringes of Manchester. There are good schools in the borough of Trafford, which have been maintained and nurtured over the years by what has generally been, and will soon be again, a good local education authority; but what about children across the city of Manchester who currently have little recourse to good education beyond the assisted places scheme?

There are 300 pupils on assisted places at Manchester grammar school and 242 at William Hulme's grammar school. What is to be done to provide new educational opportunities for the individual children who will lose the opportunities they currently enjoy? When we consider the state of affairs in many areas of Manchester it becomes plain that local schools are not good enough to provide genuine opportunities and alternatives. I should like to hear some guarantees on that issue.

Another argument for delay that has been advanced concerns the importance of allowing schools such as Manchester grammar, which is trying hard to raise funds to provide bursaries for pupils who are currently on assisted places, to find alternative funding to ensure that the education of those pupils is not interrupted, and to continue the centuries-old tradition of providing free education for pupils from poorer backgrounds.

The position of pupils who are currently on assisted places in independent schools is crucial. I should like to bring the argument down to an individual level. What about those children? We have heard grand, seductive statements about reducing class sizes, but that will occur only after a period of years. The reduction will depend on capital expenditure, and the Government have not stated clearly where that money will come from. Even when class sizes are reduced, that move will affect only a small part of the school population. That fact will not provide comfort to families in my constituency or across the city of Manchester who currently benefit from the assisted places scheme.

Other parents and pupils will be similarly affected owing to the pressures that will be placed on state schools in my constituency. I should like to hear some guarantees. What will happen to those schools? How can we guarantee that they will have more places? There are good schools and they want to expand, but they need money to do so. That money will not come from the abolition of the assisted places scheme as it has been made clear that the money has been hypothecated to reducing class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. That is one of my major concerns.

I should like a further guarantee for children who currently enjoy assisted places in independent schools in Manchester or elsewhere: that they will not lose their places until other places become available to them in acceptable state schools nearby. Assisted places could be removed from pupils, and the nearby state schools, even were they of an adequate standard, might not have available places owing to capacity constraints. That scenario seems likely: the Government say that they will reduce class sizes, but how can they do so without a major programme of capital expenditure, if not by limiting the rolls of, and admissions to, popular schools? If admissions are limited and school sizes reduced or pegged at a certain level, I cannot see that the Government can guarantee places in local schools for pupils who are currently on assisted places. I would very much welcome some guarantees on that.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I want to dwell on the timing aspect of the amendments. Had the Government gone in for calmer and wiser reflection, the Bill would not have been rushed in as a wholly negative piece of legislation. The fact that the first education legislation proposed by the new Government contains such a negative and pernicious set of proposals will be judged harshly by historians and, I dare say, regretted in the fulness of time by many Labour Members.

The Government should have taken the assisted places scheme, built on it and developed it. It is entirely natural and acceptable that a new Government should have a different perspective—that is in the nature of the democratic process. A new Government will arrive with fresh ideas and a new approach; but to abandon the scheme completely seems most undesirable. Indeed, it is not worthy of the Labour party or the House.

In the heady and excited atmosphere that prevails among Labour Members—one can hardly blame them for that—a certain lack of calm, studied reflection has delivered a hasty, harsh and extreme proposal.

6 pm

Our country has a long tradition of scholarships, bursaries and assisted places—in short, an approach that has allowed poor children from working-class families to enjoy an education that they would not have had without financial assistance. That tradition is embodied in my own home. I happen to live in a house that used to be part of a grammar school that was founded in the first Elizabethan age on the principle of giving poor children a better education. It is a principle with which I would expect many socialists and Labour party members to have some sympathy, but these proposals pay no heed to that long and noble tradition.

The Bill is a class sizes Bill. Abolishing assisted places has been seen as a way of facilitating the smaller classes that were a key part of the proposals that the Labour party put to the electorate. The proposal certainly found some resonance with the electorate: people bought the argument lock, stock and barrel. They believed that classes needed reducing and that the Labour party would bring that about.

This approach has three problems. First, smaller classes have been presented as a panacea that will deliver automatic short-term benefits. I notice Labour Members shaking their heads at that suggestion. It may not have been explicitly presented in that way, but it has certainly been presented in that way by allusion, suggestion and implication. That in turn has raised expectations that cannot be met.

There will be no automatic or direct benefit solely from reducing class sizes. Quite apart from the logistical problems, even if classes are reduced in the way suggested by the Labour Government there will be no immediate tangible benefits of the kind that many people have been led to expect. That is the problem with raising expectations that cannot be fulfilled.

Secondly, the concentration on smaller classes has eradicated from public consciousness all the other factors that affect children's performance at school. As I said on Second Reading, many of those factors are just as important as class size and some may be even more important—the jury is still out. There is a paucity of empirical information, but it is certainly arguable that many other factors are just as important as class size. I shall not go through them this evening, but we all know what they are. Relegating all these other issues to the sidelines and concentrating on class size as the panacea for delivering enhanced teaching and pupil performance has had a misleading effect.

Thirdly, class size is usually debated in the context of a didactic pedagogic model. People think of a teacher standing in front of a class, teaching by exposition and instruction. These days, however, most teaching in schools is not like that. It is more of an exchange between the teacher and the taught; the relationship between the teacher and the taught is changing, as is the role of the teacher.

I could take hon. Members to any one of 50 schools in Britain where class size in the traditional sense is not an issue because of changing group organisation and because of changes in the manipulation and use of information. It

[Mr. John Hayes]

is easy to forget, when concentrating on class size, that teachers and learners are interacting differently. Schools operate differently, and the way people gather, exchange and use information is different, too. A range of technologies has changed our gathering, exchange and use of information in education, in the House and in the world of work. If we fail to grasp that fact and take advantage of it, we shall sacrifice one means of improving the education process. We shall also fail to prepare children adequately for the world of work.

Several of my hon. Friends have already made a point that perhaps needs amplifying. It concerns—time is critical in this context too—the impact of abolition of the assisted places scheme on other schools. We have only limited published information so far on the mechanisms by which these children are to be absorbed into other schools, and that information is unclear and rather dubious. The costs, too, are unclear. Several of my hon. Friends have asked questions about the arithmetic governing the process.

For me, the most important point concerns the effect on the schools. The National Association of Head Teachers has not always been particularly friendly to the Conservative party, but even that body acknowledges that this move will inevitably limit choice. To keep class sizes down, popular schools will have to restrict admissions. Moreover, in some areas—this will differ from region to region—a large number of children will have to be absorbed into state schools.

As a result, a child who currently expects an assisted place will not get their first choice, because that would have been the assisted places scheme school. They probably will not even get their second choice, because that will be the popular school that now cannot admit them because its admission level has had to be lowered to keep class sizes down. They may end up with their third or fourth choice of school. That may be one of the many unpopular schools, where there has not been essential rationalisation of provision by the LEA—I think of my LEA in that respect—which has numerous surplus places.

The Bill will therefore be used as a way to soak up surplus places in unpopular schools. That is a serious implication. The Government have not fully explored it and they certainly have not fully justified it. Popular schools will be obliged to admit fewer children, private schools will no longer be able to offer an assisted place, and less popular schools will soak up the children who do not want to be there and whose parents have had their options limited.

Mr. Colvin: That point is clearly made in the Institute of Public Finance report. On page 2, in a paragraph headed, "Eliminating Infant Classes over 30", it says:

"Where there is no local shortage of places, and schools are reasonably close, the change could be implemented simply by re-distributing admissions from schools with larger classes to schools with smaller classes. No new teachers or classes would be needed."

However, to bring that about, we would have to return to the bad old days of direction, which we had under previous Labour Governments. People would be told, "Because you live in this area, your children will attend that school," and there would be no question of choice.

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend highlights the history of admissions. Hon. Members will remember that the previous Government freed up admissions. That did not mean that everyone got their first choice—Labour Members said that, as everyone did not get their first choice, no one should have a choice—but it meant that, as schools were able to expand to take in more pupils, many more got their first choice of school than did under the previous Labour Government. Under Labour, admission limits were set rigidly, in a way that frustrated choice, propped up bad schools and limited the flexibility of heads and governors in admissions.

My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the fact that we will return to those "bad old days" as a direct consequence of this proposal. Obviously the consequence is not being headlined by the Government because it will be deeply unpopular with the many children who will be affected.

Mr. Colvin: Old Labour.

Mr. Hayes: It may be old Labour; I would not want to suggest it. It could be old Labour resurfacing.

The private schools will be affected. I am a grammar school boy, so I have no vested interest in private education, but it seems to me that the private schools that will be affected are bound to be detrimentally affected. It is an open point whether they will be financially damaged, and I do not have the expertise to offer a view. Some have said that it will affect some of the smaller schools and may impact on their future; others have said that they will be able to make up the difference and that it will not be a problem.

Whatever happens, the Bill will change the character of private schools' admissions and limit the diversity of pupils. That is unhealthy and undesirable, and it flies in the face of the tradition of a range of people being educated in one school, with all the social and cultural benefits that accrue from such an experience. In that sense, the Bill will damage those schools.

When people think of private schools, they always think of the "Tom Brown's Schooldays" type of school—the grand public schools, the great schools. They do not remember that many of the most radical schools in the education system could have flourished only in the private sector. Would A. S. Neill's Summerhill or the Rudolf Steiner schools have existed under an LEA? Of course not. We should have a broader, more wide-ranging view about the impact that the Bill might have on the private sector and the relationship between the private sector and new ideas and the evolution and development of education.

With hindsight and on calm reflection, the Government will regret the fact that their first piece of legislation was negative. I believe that history will judge harshly the fact that their first Bill was an attack on the poor—on people who cannot afford to pay. One might argue that it is ironic and surprising that a new Labour Government's first piece of education legislation should be an attack on the poor; or perhaps it is not ironic and it is no surprise.

6.15 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid–Norfolk): I shall start by going to the nub of the Bill and supporting my hon. Friends' amendments proposing a delay. Broadly speaking, the Bill is a dog's breakfast. It is wrong on a point of principle. I remind hon. Members of what Reginald Brent, second Viscount Esher, a Liberal politician and great constitutionalist, a man who knew a lot about Parliament, said:

"The moment that—in a great controversy—a politician finds himself struggling, not for a principle, but for an expedient—his battle is half lost."

The present Government have not half lost it, but lost it completely.

Is there not a certain irony in the fact that, in the past two or three weeks, Minister after Minister has offered a review whenever an issue appears complex or difficult? We have more reviews in the House and in Westminster than Brian Rix was ever able to put on. Some time, the Deputy Prime Minister or the Minister without Portfolio will produce a review of reviews. *[Laughter.]*

There is a serious point here. The Labour party has nurtured this measure for about 18 years. The Bill is nasty and selfish. If the Labour party has been thinking about it for 18 years, it frightens me profoundly that it has managed to produce such a dog's breakfast. If this is what they have produced after 18 years, what will they produce as a result of forthcoming reviews that are to take only six months, such as the strategic defence review?

The Bill is riddled with contradictions. We should oppose it on a point of principle. Labour Members should welcome the fact that we are asking for a delay for some clear thinking, because the Labour party, in spite of 17 years in opposition, has arrived in government not yet knowing how to go about the practical business of governing.

The Bill is shot through with hypocrisy. The Government will do away with assisted places, not really to save money, but in response to the worst kind of old Labour socialism. On Second Reading, the class element came out strongly. New Labour is supposed to be classless, but there were a lot of rumblings on the Labour Back Benches about class.

As my hon. Friends have pointed out, the irony is that the assisted places scheme has helped ordinary boys and girls, giving them a helping hand up—something that many of us have had as a consequence of our education. The inconsistency is that the Government have gone out of their way to say that places involving music and ballet will not be affected. Why not? Why should music and ballet not be affected? In theory, we are talking of gifted young people; that applies to many of those who are on the assisted places scheme. We are confronted with a major inconsistency.

Mr. Luff: I hope that my hon. Friend is not urging that music and ballet should be included in the abolition of the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Simpson: Certainly not, but there is an inconsistency. Why are music and ballet not to be included? I would welcome the Minister's explanation.

Before the general election, the Labour party said that the most important issue was education, education, education. We relish the debate because we on the Opposition Benches will say during consideration of this Bill and others that there are inconsistencies in the Labour Government's education, education, education.

A golden thread runs through the debate. Indeed, it lies at the heart of the Labour Government's overall policy. It does not, however, remain intact. I remember that, during the lead-up to the general election, the Leader of the Opposition had a question-and-answer session with several hundred sixth formers. The right hon. Gentleman spelt out Labour policy, and a sixth former said, "Excuse me, Mr. Blair, but I do not follow the logic. You have criticised the Conservative Government's education, health and social policies and said that they are underfunded, but you have said that you will not increase public expenditure. One part does not equal the other."

The Bill, like much else, is a desperate attempt to try to squeeze out bits and pieces of money to produce an overall education policy that will not be properly funded. It will not be properly funded at this stage and I suggest that when the Labour party's new economic policy is fully implemented we shall see what we have had before under previous Labour Governments; it will not be education, education, education, but cuts, cuts, cuts. I urge hon. Members to support the amendment.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): As an amendment in my name will come before the Committee later this evening, I shall confine my comments on this group of amendments to the haste with which the Government are trying to introduce their proposals. I welcome, however, the comments that have been made so far that go to the harm that the Bill, if implemented, will do to children of talent who do not otherwise have opportunities of such value as the assisted places scheme open to them. When the amendment that I have tabled is before the Committee, I shall explain why it is wrong to think that bright children are being cherry-picked and taken out of the state system and put into a sort of gilded cage. The Government have the wrong idea of what the APS is all about.

We have heard about social divisions. We all regret, of course, that there should be any social divisions in our society, but given the haste with which the Government propose to implement the Bill, there will be increased social divisions, not a reduction of them.

Given the haste of which I have spoken, I am concerned about the Government's honour. It is clearly stated in schedule 35 to the Education Act 1996 that there will be a three-year rule for participating schools. I am pleased, of course, that the Government are proposing to continue with the private finance initiative. They see, as we always have done, a vital need to include the private sector in funding the needs of our society. Indeed, in this instance, the private sector is helping to do exactly that. Unfortunately that is hastily being stopped, on terms that are, in effect, a breach of contract with the participating schools.

It will be no use for the Minister to say that he is allowed to proceed because he has a mandate from the people. If that argument is advanced, any contract that a Government enter into with the private sector can be broken by a new Government on the ground that they have a mandate from the people. The effect on the attractiveness of private sector funding and initiatives will be extremely damaging and will go far beyond education, to every area where we might hope to see the private sector involved.

[Mr. Nick St. Aubyn]

I move on to think of my background in the business sector. Ask anyone in business about a change in direction, and he or she will always say that it takes a great deal longer than one would expect. The Government are pretty scanty in the reasoning behind their calculations. Indeed, it is obvious that they have undertaken only a paper exercise. In reality, there will be many hidden costs in closing down the APS. Given the Government's haste, there will be many unexpected costs. Alternatively, the Government will find that the provision of education across the board will suffer.

When, 18 years ago, the Labour party pledged to do away with the APS, the seeds of the scheme had not even been scattered. Since then, the seeds have found healthy ground and have grown from saplings into strong oaks. There are many areas where the APS is strong, doing extremely well and delivering excellent results. A sapling can be cut down in next to no time, but if a great oak is to be felled, the ground has to be prepared extremely carefully. There is obviously a need carefully to consider what might be hit or hurt in the process of the oak hitting the ground.

There are two figures of significant illustration. We know that 80,000 children have benefited from the APS. Currently, 34,000 are taking part in it. The scheme is only now reaching maturity. Its scale now was never dreamed of when the then Labour Opposition made their promise 18 years ago. The timetable of closure, however, is as if the scheme remains on the starting scale of 1981.

I am concerned about the haste with which it is proposed to close down the scheme, especially in the context of Surrey's local education authority. I know that the chairman of the education committee is concerned that when more and more children who would have gone into the APS are required to be taken into secondary schools, the funding adjustment paid by central Government to Surrey county council will be a year in arrears.

That means that, year by year, as more and more children come off the scheme, more and more will be going into secondary schools. At the same time, year after year, money will not come through until the year after. That means in effect that, in the case of Surrey, where we have a concentration of assisted places, there may be as much as a 3 per cent. shortfall in funding for our secondary schools—a real cut of 3 per cent. for Surrey's secondary schools, not in one year, but every year for five years. That is the nature of the problem, as a result of the haste with which the measure is being introduced.

The problem is that Ministers have devised the scheme to destroy assisted places with no costings, mechanisms or answers to the questions that the Opposition have raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) mentioned a series of Whitehall reviews. In this case we face the prospect of a Whitehall farce.

6.30 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): I welcome you, Mr. Lord, to the Committee. The debate has at times ranged wider than the amendments relating to clause 1, but I shall restrict my comments to the amendments under consideration.

The amendments seek to delay the implementation of the phasing out of the assisted places scheme for a further three years. The Opposition said that we were moving with haste. We believe that we are moving in a way that will deliver on a clear pledge that we made to the British people during the general election. We make no apology for that. We have had 18 years of a Government who failed to deliver on their pledges. This Government will honour the pledges that we give to the British people. The Bill provides the Committee with the opportunity to do that tonight.

Mrs. Gillan: If the Minister is so determined that the Government will honour each and every one of their pledges, will he explain why they have already broken their pledge to women by failing to create a separate Minister for Women, and giving those responsibilities instead to the Secretary of State for Social Security? That pledge has already been broken.

Mr. Byers: It would be helpful if the Committee turned its attention to the assisted places scheme. I understand why the shadow Minister does not wish to address the issues before the Committee. She has no strong arguments to defend the fact that fewer than 40,000 pupils benefit from the finance under the APS, at the same time as one in four five, six and seven-year-olds are in classes of more than 30. The Government consider that unacceptable, which is why we are introducing the Bill.

Mr. Luff: Precisely when will the Government achieve their pledged objective of class sizes of less than 30?

Mr. Byers: We made that abundantly clear during the general election campaign. I regret the fact that the hon. Gentleman did not look at our clear manifesto commitments. For the benefit of Opposition Front-Bench Members, I reiterate that, at the end of the lifetime of this Parliament, every five, six and seven-year-old in Britain will be in a class of 30 or less. That compares with the record of the Conservative Government, who allowed class sizes to increase year on year on year. We do not intend to go down that road.

Mr. Luff *rose—*

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I shall take no more interventions at this stage. I shall reply to the issues raised during the debate, and I shall take interventions at the appropriate time.

We are honouring the commitments made to the 1997 intake of young people who were offered an assisted place. By honouring that commitment, we are demonstrating that we are not motivated by dogma. We put the interests of the majority of young people first. That is why we shall allow those young people to continue to receive an assisted place.

Mrs. Gillan: Is it not true that the Government are honouring so-called places because they are determined to get more money into the scheme so that they can then take more money out of the scheme? When they looked closely at the details, the Government realised that they did not have enough money to rob from the APS to reduce class sizes. In fact, the sum is so negligible that it will not have any effect on class sizes, according to some independent commentators.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Lady may be right—we may be in a win-win situation, delivering on the pledge to reduce

class sizes and also allowing those young people to receive an assisted place this September. That might well be the outcome, and parents throughout the country will rejoice at it.

Conservative Members spoke about a point of principle, and said that the Bill was a nasty, selfish piece of legislation. It says a lot for their principles, if the fact that we are to offer improved education opportunities to 440,000 youngsters at the expense of 40,000 young people is seen as selfish. Conservative Members seem to have their own definition of selfish. It confirms the view that my father long expressed, that the Conservative party was based on three fundamental principles: envy, self-interest and greed. The debate over the past two hours shows precisely that.

Mr. Hayes: Do the Government believe that it would be possible for local education authorities to absorb into the maintained sector all the pupils displaced by the abolition of the assisted places scheme, without any additional net cost to LEAs?

Mr. Byers: That is an important point, and I was about to deal with it. Because we have decided that there will be not an outright abolition of the assisted places scheme, but a phasing out effectively for a seven-year period, we believe that there will be no difficulty in ensuring that the pupils who may have gone into an assisted place can be catered for by the maintained sector.

The figures are interesting, and the Committee should be made aware of them. It is calculated that there would be a maximum of 10,000 young people entering the assisted places scheme in September 1998, if the scheme were to be continued. If we assumed that not one of those young people went into the independent sector but that they were all to be educated in the maintained sector, they would add one eighth of 1 per cent. to the total national maintained school population of 8 million. They can be accommodated within the sector, particularly because, as some Opposition Members will be aware, the local education authority concerned will have its education standard spending assessment amended in the light of the increased number of pupils who will be attending those maintained schools.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am afraid that the Minister has ignored the fact that one eighth of 1 per cent. means nothing. What is significant is the number of pupils in relation to the year group that they are entering, and the impact on that year group. Furthermore, in some parts of the country, including the area that I represent, the concentration of children in assisted places is higher than the average by a factor of six or seven. The Government's calculation of the impact on such areas is widely astray.

Mr. Byers: I understand why, as a constituency Member of Parliament, the hon. Gentleman defends the interests of his area, Guildford. We intend to govern on behalf of the entire country. That means introducing a measure this evening that will ensure that we deliver on the pledge that we made to the British people. I understand why the Opposition, used as they are to a Government of drift and dither, do not like the idea of a Government who are prepared to deliver on behalf of the British people. The Government will do precisely that. There is no need for any delay this evening. Tonight we begin the process of delivering on that pledge, and that is why I urge the Committee to reject the amendments.

Mrs. Gillan: That was an incredible performance.

Mr. Luff: On a point of order, Mr. Lord. I think that I know the answer to this point of order before I raise it, but do you have any power to encourage a Minister to answer the points raised during a debate?

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): It is not the job of the Chair to decide how Ministers respond to debates.

Mrs. Gillan: I almost feel like saying, "Further to that point of order." That is one of the most appalling performances that I have heard at the Dispatch Box. The Minister has come to the Committee to talk about a Bill that is destroying a style of education available to 40,000 pupils in Britain, yet he does not have the courtesy to give straight answers to straight questions posed by my hon. Friends. People inside and outside the House will notice that the Minister has run away from those issues. He talks of dogma, but the Bill is based on nothing but socialist dogma.

One of the questions that the Minister has failed to answer concerns the fact that LEAs will be given extra money in the standard spending assessments to cover the additional pupils they will have to absorb. That will be in *Hansard* and a matter of record. How will the Government guarantee that that money will be spent on children and extra teachers in order to reduce class sizes? At the moment, there is no mechanism to transfer the money directly to the classroom.

Obviously, the Labour Government will become so arrogant, dictatorial and authoritative that they will change the basis on which all LEAs operate. I hope that all LEAs are listening to the debate. They should look out, because the Government will tell them exactly how to spend their money in future. That is the only way in which the Minister can keep the pledge that he has made at the Dispatch Box tonight.

Mr. Colvin: Conservative Members have become used to the fact that the fifth column in the Labour party has traditionally been the trade union movement. But looking at the new Labour intake, one recognises another fifth column, which is local government. Although the Chancellor has said that he will honour the spending commitments, there is no commitment to provide the extra £250 million net that the scheme will cost, and unless the Government can deliver to local government their manifesto commitments, Labour Back Benchers will begin to shout the odds and demand that that money be provided. I do not yet know where that money will come from.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. The Government have on their Back Benches many unknown quantities. I am sure that they have been busy finding out more about them. They never expected to be elected, and the Government never expected to have to deal with them. However, I am sure that the hon. Members who were surprised at their own election are still Members of

[Mrs. Gillan]

integrity, and they will start asking questions of the Government—questions which patently, from the Minister's performance tonight, he is unable to answer.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend raised an important point about how we can ensure that the extra money granted by the SSA system will be given to individual schools. This year, £500,000 of the increase that the previous Government gave Gloucestershire LEA has not gone to the schools. If a similar thing happens in this regard, we shall be in difficulty.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend makes his point and reinforces it. I remember, in the dim and distant days when I was a Minister, a delegation from a Labour council from the north of England, who asked for more money for several schools in her area. She was surprised to find that the Department had already allocated money to those schools which, mysteriously, had never reached them.

The Minister still has so many questions to answer that I do not know how he has the gall to sit down after such a short speech.

Mr. Luff: I did not receive an answer from the Minister. I sought to intervene, but he suggested that he would make a longer speech. I asked him about the phasing out of the assisted places scheme and the class sizes pledge. How much will the Minister have saved from the abolition of the assisted places scheme at the end of this Parliament to enable him to meet his class sizes pledge? Surely he will not have enough. I wanted to ask him that, but I was denied the opportunity.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is right, and I shall give the Minister the opportunity to answer that directly. How much money will be available at the end of this year?

Mr. Byers: By the end of this century, £100 million will be available, and that will be enough to deliver on the class sizes pledge.

Mrs. Gillan: I repeat the question to the Minister. How much money will be available at the end of the first year? The Minister is repeating parrot fashion the lines written by his officials. He does not have an original thought in his head. I ask him to answer the question directly.

Mr. Byers: As we all know from our days in opposition, when the hon. Lady was a Minister, she certainly parroted the lines prepared for her by civil servants.

We have always made it clear that the pledge will be honoured at the end of the lifetime of this Parliament. By 2000, £100 million will be freed up from the assisted places scheme, and that will make an important contribution towards achieving our class sizes pledge.

6.45 pm

Mrs. Gillan: That intervention really was not worth giving way to, was it, Mr. Lord?

Mr. Lidington: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Gillan: Yes, I think that my hon. Friend will have a worthwhile contribution to make.

Mr. Lidington: As the Minister has just reasserted that the Government hope for savings of £100 million by the end of the century, yet the independent Institute of Public Finance says that the savings will be about £34 million net before taking account of the £100 million capital expenditure that would then be needed, does my hon. Friend agree that we might be able to have a more informed debate if the Minister were to place in the Library of the House a detailed analysis of the Government's calculations, so that we could see exactly why the Government argue that the Institute of Public Finance is wrong?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend has made the point, and I hope that the Minister has been listening to it. I shall give way to him if he would like to agree to put a detailed explanation in the Library. He does not want to intervene, so he obviously does not want to do that.

We have had some excellent speeches. My hon. Friends have spoken with great passion and feeling on the subject, compared with the derisory miniature speech delivered by the Minister just now. It is good to see so many Labour Members, because at one time so interested were the Government in education, education, education that about five Labour Members were listening to the debate. Yet the Government asked for this Committee stage to be taken on the Floor of the House. There was no interest in the debate, because they have closed their mind. The Government are just pushing the scheme aside, out of sight, out of mind. The guillotine is coming down.

What is the hurry? The amendments asked the Government to stop and think. Let us put in proportion what we are talking about. The Minister said time and again that by the end of the century the Government will have saved £100 million. That is less than 0.001 per cent. of the education budget. It is a derisory amount. For the sake of raising such a derisory amount, the Minister will end a system that is providing a first-class education to 40,000 of our children. Will that £100 million contribute to reducing class sizes to the level that the Minister wants? A little, but nowhere near enough to reduce class sizes to 30 by the end of the Government's life. He has failed to answer any of the questions that have been posed by me and my hon. Friends.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister's disgraceful response to my intervention shows that the Government will look after people on low incomes if they are in a Labour area, but that the Government have no care for the future benefit of people with low incomes in Conservative areas?

Mrs. Gillan: That is obvious from everything that was said on Second Reading, and if my hon. Friend reads *Hansard* for that debate, he will see the theme of envy running through all the contributions from Labour Members.

The questions that the Minister has not answered are very serious. For example, how should local education authorities prepare for the increased number of children they will have to accept? Not all parents who would have an assisted place for their child will be able to make the sacrifice to spend the money and send their child to an independent school.

How should schools gear themselves up and make provision for the change? In a written answer to a question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), it is obvious that the Minister does not know. He was asked:

"what estimate he has made of the number of extra primary teachers to be provided from the abolition of the assisted places scheme in each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02."

He replied:

"It will be for individual LEAs to judge what adjustments will be needed to primary teacher numbers to ensure smaller classes."

He obviously has not consulted LEAs about the numbers needed to provide smaller classes. He has therefore certainly not consulted the LEAs about how they will prepare for the increased numbers of children who will no longer attend independent schools.

The Minister is being stupid. He should accept the amendments and proceed more slowly. I understand that the Government want to get rid of the assisted places scheme. I understand their hatred for it and the way in which they despise independent education, notwithstanding the fact that more than 40 Labour Members were educated in independent schools.

Had the Minister not been so pig-headed and slowed down, time would have solved his problems. The Girls Public Day Schools Trust would have had time to get its fund up and running, to try to replace the moneys from the assisted places scheme. Other schools throughout the country might have had time to make provision to replace what the Government will rob from the community. By proceeding so rapidly, the Minister will cause children to fall back on the local education authorities' provision, and, by his own admission, those authorities have not been consulted and are not prepared for what might happen.

By failing to accept the amendments, the Minister will damage individuals. He obviously does not care about the effect that the Bill will have on families, because he is not listening. What will happen to the families who expected, the year after next, that their child would have a good chance of getting an assisted place? He has dashed their hopes by not accepting our sensible proposals. We do not suggest stopping abolition, because we understand that that is what the Minister wants to do, but we ask him to take more time to do it for the sake of the children.

The Government obviously have no respect for children, and certainly they have no respect for the education of the 40,000 children we are discussing. We shall therefore press the amendment to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 138, Noes 353.

Division No. 15] **[6.54 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin

Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan

Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Jane Kennedy.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mrs. Gillan: The heart of the Bill is contained in clause 1: it is the vehicle which the Government are using to snatch the assisted places scheme from the grasp of 34,000 children. We had a good debate on the amendments to clause 1, but they did not cover the scheme as a whole or the principles behind the abolition of the scheme.

The scheme played an integral part in the previous Government's policy of promoting choice, diversity and excellence in education. It gave choice to parents, especially parents on low incomes. As we heard on Second Reading, more than 40 per cent. of children who attended independent schools on assisted places came from families with an income of less than £10,000. More than 80 per cent. of the pupils currently in the scheme come from families whose income is below the national average.

It is amazing that, for the purposes of other debates on other subjects, the Government deem a family that has a total income of below £10,000 to be in poverty, but for the purposes of abolishing the assisted places scheme, it was suggested on Second Reading that some of those families were Lloyd's names or other undeserving individuals. I find that abhorrent, because it has been obvious from the examination of the scheme over many years that the families who benefit have incomes in the lowest quartile.

Mr. Clappison: I think that it was the Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), who said on Second Reading that about 1,000 families with an income of more than £24,000 received assistance. Is my hon. Friend aware that a family in such circumstances has to make a contribution of more than £3,000? Does she agree that that is a substantial sacrifice for a family on such an income, and it shows how highly those families value the assisted places scheme?

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend is right. The Government have no concept of the sacrifice that families make to obtain what they consider to be the right education for their children.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Lady asserted that it was outrageous to say that children of Lloyd's names received an assisted place. Will she confirm that that statement was made by the former Conservative Member for Buckingham, George Walden?

Mrs. Gillan: Unlike Labour Members, I will not confirm something that I do not know. The Minister quotes the former Member for Buckingham, but it was obvious to everyone that I did not hold the same views as him on this subject. That comment was quoted and endorsed by Labour Members, so the politics of envy is alive and kicking.

The guide issued by the Department for Education and Employment says that, at the top of the scale, a family whose combined income in a tax year is £26,000 would have to make a contribution out of taxed income of £4,059. A family with two children in the scheme would have to pay £3,042 for each child, so they would be paying more than £6,000 out of taxed income towards their children's education.

7.15 pm

Families are prepared to pay that contribution because they believe in the scheme and think that it is worth while. They are willing to make the sacrifice. I know parents who are on incomes much higher than that but are not willing to make the sacrifice to send their children to independent schools. Perhaps they believe that that form of education is not right for their child.

The parents who have applied for assisted places and whose children have been clever enough to obtain places in independent schools believe that that form of education is right for their children. The Government are now telling them that they will no longer have the opportunity to obtain the education that they believe and know is best for their child.

There is no doubt that the Government are treating independent schools with great disdain. They have broken the contract with independent schools. As one of my hon. Friends rightly said in the debate on the amendments, there was a three-year contract with these schools and the Government have broken it. The breaking of that contract will go down in history as one of the biggest acts of political envy that the Government could perpetrate.

The raison d'etre for abolishing the scheme comes down to two Labour soundbites: "We will reduce class sizes" and—

Mr. Phil Woolas (Oldham, East and Saddleworth): Govern for the many, not the few.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Member has repeated it very well—"We will govern for the many, not the few."

The effect of a reduction in class sizes has been examined over and again. The Government's sums do not add up. They have consistently tried to pull the wool over our eyes about the amounts that are needed to meet their targets. If they do not know the amount of money that is required to reduce class sizes to below 30 by the end of the lifetime of this Parliament, how can they possibly justify destroying the scheme and saving a small amount of money that will go only part way towards reaching that target?

Where will the extra money come from to reduce class sizes? The Minister is not listening, because he does not care and he does not know the answer. If he knew the answer, he would have given it in the previous debate. Once again, I am giving the Minister the opportunity to answer the questions that he failed to answer in the previous debate. How much money must he find to reduce class sizes to 30 by the end of this Parliament?

[Mrs. Gillan]

I feel strongly about this subject, which is more than can be said for the Minister. How will LEAs prepare for the increased number of children who may be thrown into their schools because of the abolition of the scheme? Why have the Government not delayed the scheme to enable independent schools to replace the money that they currently receive from assisted places? The Minister does not have the resources to fund his pledges. He will take a meagre amount from the abolition of the scheme, and that is the pathetic excuse for the legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for South–East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) asked the Minister in a written question what estimate he had made of the amount of money that would be available for education from the abolition of the assisted places scheme, net of the cost of educating within the state sector those pupils who would otherwise have been on the assisted places scheme. The Minister replied:

"There will be no significant additional burden on Local Education Authorities from educating children who would otherwise have entered the assisted places scheme each year."

Does that mean that those children will be educated free? The Minister's answer suggests that he has no concept of the cost of each place at a maintained school. He has said that there will be "no significant additional burden" on LEAs. Will he define a "significant additional burden"? The Minister's answer to my hon. Friend was a fudge, and I expect him to define that answer when he replies to the debate. It is another question in addition to all those that he has disrespectfully failed to answer in Committee.

Will the Minister give an undertaking, based on his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for South–East Cambridgeshire, that no LEA will face additional costs as a result of taking children who would otherwise have been educated under the assisted places scheme? He could probably give an undertaking on that—if he is prepared to stand by his answer to that written question, which he answered today.

I should like to deal with the soundbite on which this vicious legislation is based.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): Vicious?

Mrs. Gillan: Yes, I said vicious, and I hope that the Minister heard me correctly. I am glad that I have the House's attention.

The Government have said that they will govern for the many, not the few. Have Labour Members analysed that pathetic little soundbite? If they believe it, we face one of the most dangerous Governments that the country has had. Any Government who take their responsibilities seriously would appreciate that they have to govern for the few. It is essential to protect the interests of minorities, and sometimes to enhance their lives. To govern for the many and not the few would mean that many programmes would be abolished. That is what is to happen to the assisted places scheme.

If the Government intend to govern for the many and not for the few, I presume that they will abolish section 11 funding. The Government of which I was a member provided that funding, and I presume that the present Government will continue to do that until they fall back on their soundbites. That funding is not for the many: it is for the few people for whom English is not the first language. If the Government intend to keep their pledges, they will do away with section 11 funding. Governing for the many and not for the few means that money will not be put into the travellers education unit. That money is for the few children of travellers who might need a special type of education which costs more than the average place in the primary or secondary sectors.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I have allowed some latitude, but I should be grateful if the hon. Lady returned to the debate on the clause.

Mrs. Gillan: I mean no discourtesy to the Chair. The clause is the heart of the Bill. I have said that the Government's pledge is that they will govern for the many, not the few, and I shall relate that directly to assisted places.

If the Government are to stick to that pledge, why should they continue to support the music and ballet scheme? I am thrilled that that scheme is to continue. It has provided specialised education for 644 of our most talented youngsters who have expertise in ballet or music. The scheme costs nearly £8 million. That is governing for the few, not the many, so why could not the assisted places scheme be retained? It is for the few, as are section 11 funding, special education needs funding and funding for the travellers units. Those are the few in our society.

Labour Members should bear in mind the fact that government has to be for the few as well as for the many. The Government's soundbite is bankrupt.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gillan: No. I am in full flood. My adage is, when in full flood do not give way to a Flynn.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Lady may be in full flow, but I should be grateful if she would return to the clause.

Mrs. Gillan: For the sake of a soundbite, clause 1 destroys the assisted places scheme. The Government operate double standards on other schemes and their expenditure on some children is far in excess of the average expenditure on each child in the scheme. The clause takes abrupt action to finish the scheme in its entirety. It is motivated by hatred and based on double standards, and it uses arithmetic that has never added up. The Minister has so far failed to answer questions. I hope that he will later answer all the questions that my hon. Friends and I have put to him. I hope that he has made a note of each question and that he will provide us with full answers. If he cannot do that, he should withdraw his Bill because it will destroy a valuable scheme for many children.

7.30 pm

Mr. Hayes: I rise to introduce some further issues. I hope that the House will forgive me for being fairly comprehensive in taking an elaborate tour of the local education authorities of Great Britain.

I shall start with the Nottinghamshire LEA, of which I have been a member for a dozen or so years. It is absolutely clear—the Bill is relevant to this—that class size is of diminishing importance. I said in the previous debate that although the Government—and, by implication, the Bill—focus on class size, it is of diminishing importance due to the changing nature of teaching and learning. Some hon. Members looked a little mystified at that. I know that not all hon. Members, especially Labour Members, are fully briefed on and acquainted with such matters. *[Interruption.]* I do not mean that in a patronising way—really. I was talking about the nature of technology, technology support in schools and the way in which teachers use technology to facilitate better teaching and learning.

Labour Members and the architects of the proposals before us have not grasped such a change. Perhaps they feel that the wider public have not grasped it, so it is not politically sensible to base policy around it. Perhaps people have not come to terms with the change because they are not familiar with what is happening at the leading edge of education. Surely Ministers have a responsibility to reflect such a fundamental change in the nature of the Bill.

The proposals are based on the false premise that to eliminate disadvantage one must restrict opportunity. It might be laudable to want to eliminate disadvantage, and considering the way in which socialists typically run LEAs, I am sure that they would claim that as their motivation. I do not, however, believe that the method of eliminating disadvantage by pulling people down is either laudable or acceptable. It is all born of the notion that if everyone cannot have it, no one should have it. That is the core principle of the Bill.

Just under 40,000 people are enjoying the advantages of the assisted places scheme. One might argue that that is a very small number and that the scheme therefore does not touch the lives of many families. To use the word of the Minister for School Standards, I have no envy—or bitterness or jealousy—about the opportunity, advantage and choice being given to those 37,000 or 40,000 people. Since I have none of those feelings, I have no desire to frustrate or restrict their opportunity and choice. I do not believe that that is true of many—I do not say all—Labour Members. I do not take a naive view that they are all wicked; some are just misguided. Such feelings are fundamental to some of the thinking of a number of the architects of the proposals.

When I said earlier that the legislation was negative and pernicious, I was saying so more in sorrow than in anger. I ask the Government to look again at how to eliminate disadvantage without restricting opportunity. Was not it Abraham Lincoln who said, "You don't make the poor richer by making the rich poorer"? There is a parallel there somewhere—hon. Members may have to search for it, but it is there somewhere.

I turn to funding. Members of the fifth column, as having a background in local government was described earlier—well, I come from local government, too—will appreciate that there is no mechanism or structure for delivering the money from assisted places in a direct exchange of funds. The implication of what is before the House is that there could be a direct transfer of the money saved by abolishing assisted places to reduce class sizes, yet the mechanism for doing so does not exist.

We need to answer the question whether there is a precedent for the targeted ring fencing of money outside the LEA structure. Some hon. Members—probably more on the Opposition Benches—might not have a problem with that, but I should have thought that it would cause considerable problems for the Labour party and create considerable tension between the parliamentary Labour party and the many Labour-controlled LEAs, which will jealously guard the right to decide precisely how to spend the money allocated to them for education. We have not had a satisfactory answer to that question.

In order to facilitate a direct transfer of the money from the assisted places scheme to the reduction of class sizes in the very speedy way suggested, one would have to a devise new mechanism. There is certainly no evidence of that in any clause. Nor has it been evident in any explanation, answer, or lack of answer given in Committee or on Second Reading.

I should like to draw attention to the scale involved. Cost per pupil is, of course, variable. The cost per pupil in many LEAs—I could obviously name a number of examples in London—is much higher than the average, as has been said. The average cost per pupil of about £2,700 is very different from the extremes, which are much lower and much higher. There is a patchy picture of not only the cost of readmitting pupils to their LEA but the number of pupils affected.

Since the take-up of the assisted places scheme varies and, therefore, the number of children who will be reabsorbed into any one LEA is different, and given the varying cost of educating pupils, we need clear explanations of the implications that such variations will have in different parts of the country. That has not been adequately dealt with or explained to the satisfaction of—I would have thought—any hon. Member. We have not had a full, detailed and unequivocal statement on that.

I also want to draw attention, at the risk of being verbose, to the record on class sizes. It is not the parody or caricature that has been drawn for us today. Class sizes have been more a result of changes in the birth rate and local demography than they have of any Government's policy. That is best illustrated by the record of class sizes over the past 30 years. Many younger Members will recall their own education in quite large classes. Around about 1975, class sizes reached a peak under the previous Labour Government, not as a result—

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The clause stand part debate goes wider than debate on amendments, but class sizes have nothing to do with assisted places. The hon. Member must talk about assisted places.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful for that advice. I am sure that you will appreciate, Mr. Martin, that as a new Member I have a lot to learn. I am always willing to take advice and guidance from any quarter.

The abolition of the assisted places scheme has been put forward as a means of delivering smaller classes. Indeed, the Minister made that point during today's

[Mr. Hayes]

debate. He said that the legitimate mandate he had from the British people—I have no argument with him about that because he and his colleagues put their case fairly and squarely—was about the relationship between the abolition of the assisted places scheme and the facilitation of the policy for smaller class sizes.

Mrs. Gillan: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. On the front page of the Bill, under the heading "Financial effects of the Bill" it says:

"The Bill's provisions will lead to savings which will be spent on reducing infant class sizes in the maintained sector."

Can you confirm that, as that is on the front of the Bill, it is pertinent to the entire Bill, including clause 1? I should be grateful for your guidance because I am sure that that is why many hon. Members, including myself, have been referring to that. I should be awfully grateful for your advice.

The First Deputy Chairman: The hon. Lady will get my advice. People can mention various matters during a debate, but they must keep relating them to the clause. The clause is about the abolition of assisted places. If someone tells me that there is a connection with class sizes, I can accept it, but if someone debates class sizes for ever and a day, I cannot accept it. I must keep pulling the debate back to the clause. Perhaps that will help the hon. Lady and others.

Mrs. Gillan: Thank you very much for that clarification, Mr. Martin. Hon. Members have felt justified in referring to class sizes because of what it says on the front of the Bill. That has given me a clear indication of what the Chair wants. Thank you very much.

The First Deputy Chairman: Hon. Members need not worry about my intervening. I am here to try to keep things right. If there is any difficulty, I will soon let hon. Members know. There is no problem with that.

Mr. Hayes: That was extraordinarily erudite, Mr. Martin.

I want to return to the issue raised by the Minister which is the relationship between assisted places and class sizes and I want to do that if only to get the Minister off the hook. If the Bill were just about abolishing assisted places and was unrelated to the size of classes, it would be entirely negative. That is why class size has been put forward as a crucial element in the debate and has been mentioned on the front of the Bill. If it were simply the business of getting rid of assisted places for a negative reason—

Mr. Oliver Heald (North–East Hertfordshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the key points being made by Conservative Members is that to say that this provision is for the purpose of reducing class sizes is just window dressing? That is not really the purpose; it is just a spiteful little measure.

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend is harsher than I am. I was being generous and trying to offer an olive branch to the Minister. I was trying to help him to justify why he is doing this, because I know that he is having some difficulties. I am suggesting that there may be a positive side as well as the pernicious, negative and unpleasant side to the abolition of assisted places. However, my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) may be right and the issue of class size may be irrelevant.

The fact that all this cannot be delivered easily, that there are no figures available, that the sums do not add up and that there are no mechanisms for ringfencing and targeting this money for LEAs, may mean that this is all a charade. This may be just the negative business of taking away from working-class children the opportunity of attending private schools. However, I prefer to be generous and to assume that this is a two-sided coin.

7.45 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Will my hon. Friend consider another aspect of this nasty little measure? Many of the children on assisted places come from emotionally deprived homes and are sent to residential schools in the private sector because there are no residential schools in the public sector for children who are emotionally deprived or from emotionally disturbed families. In fact, this measure is hitting not only children from poor homes but children who are emotionally deprived as well.

Mr. Hayes: One of the most fundamental problems facing education—I think that this will be acknowledged by both sides of the House—and which has been taken on board by a number of experts is the increasing number of children with special needs or statemented children with emotional or behavioural difficulties. As my hon. Friend said, there is a real mismatch between the increase in the number of such children and adequate provision to deal with them. What has happened in many LEAs—

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: In a moment. I am getting rather good at this.

What is happening in many LEAs is that, as a result of the integration of special needs children into the mainstream, the specialist provision that previously existed for emotionally and behaviourally challenged children has been reduced.

Mr. Willis: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this point has nothing to do with the assisted places scheme? The vast majority of LEAs in this country are desperately short of resources and were squeezed to death by the previous Government. They have real difficulties trying to educate children with severe learning difficulties, particularly psychological or emotional difficulties. They make provision to teach such children through their existing budgets, not through the assisted places scheme. The hon. Gentleman made his point extremely well but extremely badly.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman's intervention belies the fact that the motivation for the integration of special needs children into the mainstream came not from financial necessity but from the ideological perspective born of Warnock and the Education Act 1980, which was

introduced by the Conservative Government. I make no value judgment about that, but initially LEAs, regardless of the party in control, were encouraged to integrate children into the mainstream—

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): On a point of order, Mr. Martin. Is this still in order, because it does not have much to do with assisted places?

The First Deputy Chairman: The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) must relate his remarks to clause 1.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful for your advice, Mr. Martin. I flirted briefly with that subject because I was distracted by an irrelevant point from the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis).

Mr. Steen: My point, from which the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough tried to distract my hon. Friend, had nothing to do with children with special needs. The assisted places scheme helped children from emotionally deprived homes or from families with emotional problems to attend residential schools because there are very few such schools in the public sector. I should like my hon. Friend's views on that.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) should know better. Recent interventions have been very long.

Mr. Hayes: Hon. Members with considerably more experience than I are seducing me into all sorts of areas and I feel a little bewildered and confused.

It is true that the assisted places scheme offered an opportunity to go to a type of school that does not exist in the mainstream. In that sense, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes is absolutely right. The extension of diversity of provision offered by the scheme to a wider range of children was a fundamental aspect of it.

The counter-argument might be—again, I am attempting to be helpful to the Minister—that the scheme applied to only a small number of children. As I said earlier, however, that aspect of the scheme does not justify its abolition.

The appeal of the assisted places scheme was that, for 37,000 children, it offered diversity and choice. The Bill's passage will eliminate that choice, and that is undesirable. Although only a small number benefited, I celebrate the fact that that small number had such extended opportunities.

In conclusion—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh, no."] Yes, although I promised that I would make a tour of local education authorities, I was only teasing Labour Members.

Mr. Heald: In dealing with clause 1, my hon. Friend has been discussing whether the assisted places scheme should be abolished. A middle course proposed by the Liberal Democrats, however, is that it should be "sort of" abolished, although local authorities would be able to "sort of make something similar in a way" of an agreement with a local authority. What does my hon. Friend think of that patchwork quilt approach?

Mr. Hayes: Perhaps I can summarise the Liberal Democrats' approach to the issue. Whereas Labour Members, by using the issue of class sizes, are wolves in sheep's clothing, the Liberal Democrats are sheep in sheep's clothing.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): In cheap clothing?

Mr. Hayes: No, sheep's; they are sheep in sheep's clothing. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) has benefited from a good education—perhaps from an assisted place, although he looks a little too old.

Mr. Willis: On a point of order, Mr. Lord.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): He is Mr. Martin.

Mr. Willis: Mr. Martin, are the hon Gentleman's comments at all pertinent to clause 1?

The First Deputy Chairman: The Committee is getting out of hand, so I will have to be a little more strict. The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) must speak to the clause, and other hon. Members must not make sedentary interventions.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Martin. Liberal Democrat Members were diverting me from the straight and narrow, as they have done so often in so many constituencies across the country.

The assisted places scheme offered opportunity, hope and a new chance—not to the wealthy, to the privilege or to those whom one might expect the Labour party to have in its sights, but to ordinary people and poor children who would never have dreamed of an opportunity to attend the type of school that has been open to them because of the scheme. To abolish the assisted places scheme is not only negative and pernicious, it is a disgrace for which, in the fulness of time, the Labour party will have many regrets and full remorse.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): I should, first, declare a personal interest—not a financial interest—in that I am chairman of the governors of Abingdon school, which is the school that I attended. I undertake that office in a completely unpaid capacity.

Abingdon school provides an instructive example for this debate. When I attended Abingdon, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was a direct grant school. It is an ancient foundation, whose historic mission was to provide an excellent education for bright boys in the town of Abingdon and its surrounding areas, and it continued with that historic mission until that paring Social Democrat, Baroness Williams, came along and abolished the direct grant system. A few years later, when the assisted places scheme was devised, Abingdon offered places under the scheme, and it has continued to do so to this day.

Some schools were badly affected when socialism dealt that last blow to the direct grant school system. Some schools were weakened, although others were strengthened. Fortunately, Abingdon was one of the latter, and it has flourished as a fully independent school. One effect of axing the direct grant scheme was universal to all the schools that operated it: those schools became more, not less, elitist. All the talk about help for the many

[Mr. Francis Maude]

and not for the few is nonsense. Abolishing the scheme made schools more elitist, against the wishes of most of them. Today, many of those schools are the same ones that offer assisted places, continuing to provide an excellent education for bright children from less-advantaged backgrounds.

The Education (Schools) Bill shows the cycle coming round again. It is instructive to note that the Bill has been introduced so early in the Parliament and that Ministers are railroading it through as fast as they can. There is no pretence that this is a constitutional Bill. The only reason for having its Committee stage on the Floor of the House is so that Ministers can bang it through as quickly as possible. We are beginning to discover what lies at the heart of the brave new Labour Government and of their brave new world.

Ministers prate about modernisation, but the Bill is about destruction. It will do nothing to make life better for anyone. The Bill—with clause 1 at its heart—will not improve a single child's education. In the years to come, however, it will damage the education of tens of thousands of children. The Government claim that their priorities are "education, education and education", but the message that the public will draw from the Bill is one of "destruction, destruction and destruction".

The Bill does not build for the future, and none of its provisions will help anyone. Conservative Members have made that point with devastating accuracy, but we still await any convincing response from the Minister. He sits on the Treasury Bench, with all his smirking arrogance, and refuses to deal with the points that we are making—he smirks even now.

Where are the answers to the questions asked by my hon. Friends about the effects of the savings? What savings will the Bill achieve after children are displaced out of the independent system and provided places in the maintained sector? From where will the savings come? How many extra teachers to reduce class sizes will the Bill provide? The Minister does not know. He knows, as the independent studies have shown, that the figures do not add up.

The Bill comes down to destruction—from dogma, from envy and for the sake of a soundbite. At the beginning of the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) spoke about soundbites, at which point, sure enough, a soundbite was delivered. I did not hear a bleeper—it must have been one of those silent devices—but, nevertheless, the words came from the hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas): "for the many and not for the few."

I hope that the Committee will reject clause 1 for many reasons. The main reason, however, is that education should be about excellence. After all the previous Labour Government's actions on education, Ministers should have learnt—but they have not—that it is very easy to destroy and to eliminate the good, but that it is much more difficult to build. For a Government who claim to be about building the new Britain, they are off to a pretty poor start.

I should like to hear a reply from the Minister, and he had plenty of opportunity to do so during the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), who gave a most splendid and accomplished performance. Today, we witnessed the birth of a parliamentary star. Will the Minister answer the questions? I doubt it.

At the end of the next academic year, when the first effects of this vicious measure begin to bite, how much money will be available? How will the Minister use that money to achieve the much-vaunted target of reducing class sizes? We do not know; he does not know—

Mr. Steen *rose—*

Mr. Maude: Perhaps my hon. Friend knows.

Mr. Steen: I wonder whether my hon. Friend can help my understanding of what the Government are trying to do. All the schools in my constituency are full. Each year, 1,011 children join the assisted places scheme. Where will those 1,011 children go when the Government get rid of the scheme? I cannot get an answer to that from the Government, so perhaps my hon. Friend can help me.

8 pm

Mr. Maude: I would love to help my hon. Friend; it is a question I have been asking. My constituency contains one of the great historic educational establishments in this country, Christ's Hospital. Like my old school of Abingdon, Christ's Hospital has always had the historic mission of providing outstanding education solely for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Most of the support for those children comes from its own foundation. Because of the generosity of philanthropists over the century, the school has a large foundation which is used in the best possible way to help children from disadvantaged families. It also takes up places under the assisted places scheme, and it does a terrific job for those children.

As in my hon. Friend's constituency, most of the schools in my constituency are full. It is an area with an expanding population. I do not know where those children who are denied the opportunity to take up an assisted place, at Christ's Hospital and other local schools, will go. We want the Minister to answer those questions, but we see no sign of him doing so.

I want to make another point about the destructive kernel of the Bill, which is contained in this clause. It relates to the way it was justified by the Prime Minister and other Front-Bench spokesmen during and before the election campaign. They said that the assisted places scheme was a subsidy to the private sector, making it appear that profiteering organisations were making money out of the scheme. I will give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that that remark was made out of simple ignorance and was not a deliberate distortion of the truth. The Minister will correct me if I am being too generous—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Government are too arrogant to admit that they are wrong and apologise. That was made abundantly clear yesterday.

The soundbite use to justify the Bill is that the scheme is a subsidy to the private sector. That is wrong. For reasons that I have explained, I know Abingdon school better than most. There, every assisted place is subsidised by the school to the tune of £750 a year. It does no service to the finances of Abingdon school to take on boys with assisted places. Indeed, the school would be considerably better off without assisted places. It is a flourishing school that can fill its places with boys paying full fees. Abolition

of assisted places is not a problem for the school—but it is a problem for the boys who would have had those places. Incidentally, those places are subsidised by the full-fee-paying boys.

If the Bill is passed, that school, against its wishes, will become more exclusive and more elitist. It will continue to provide excellent education, but only for those who can afford it. Because we take seriously our mission to provide excellent schooling for disadvantaged children, we, like other schools, will do our best to provide assistance through our foundation—meagre though it is at Abingdon—so that the benefits of a social mix and excellent education can be provided as widely as possible. However, it will be difficult. The inevitable, destructive truth is that schools like Abingdon will be able to spread their benefits less widely.

When the Minister replies, I hope that he will make a better fist of justifying the Bill than he has done so far. All that I have heard from him and his colleagues is the language of destruction. They do not like the scheme because it is for the few. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham said, there are plenty of schemes that are for the few, but I do not hear the Government proposing to abolish them. Perhaps they will do that later. When the Minister gets going with his binge of arrogant and destructive activity, perhaps he will tell us that there is more to come. The language is one of dogmatism, spite, destruction and envy. It is an arrogant determination to drive the Bill through, regardless of its merits and regardless of the children who will be affected.

The arrogant way in which the Minister disdains to answer the questions put to him makes me think that he is ashamed of the Bill. I will do him the credit of believing that he wants to improve education overall and that deep in his heart he knows that the Bill goes in the other direction. He knows that the assisted places scheme provides, at a modest cost per place, an excellent education for a moderate number of disadvantaged children.

Mr. Byers *rose—*

Mr. Maude: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he will answer our questions.

Mr. Byers: Will the hon. Gentleman, who is the chairman of the governors of Abingdon school, tell us why, if the assisted places scheme is so popular and such a success, of the 106 places available at the school in 1996-97, only 89 have been taken up?

Mr. Maude: Some governors saw the hon. Gentleman coming. They heard his vindictive language, and that of his colleagues. They thought—I tried to persuade them that they were wrong, but I failed—that a Labour Government might be coming and that the first thing they would do was to act in this vindictive and malicious way and destroy the scheme. They therefore reluctantly decided to wind down the number of places. It was very much against their wishes. The governors—this is true of all assisted places schools—would have preferred the scheme to remain, albeit at some financial cost to the school, so that the school could continue with its historic mission of helping bright children from disadvantaged backgrounds. I happen to mind about that; I am sorry that the Minister does not.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I want to address my remarks to the first few lines of clause 1, in particular the words

"shall cease to have effect".

I want to explain why I do not believe that the Bill should proceed—and clause 1 is clearly essential to the Bill. I believe that the assisted places scheme should continue.

I declare an interest in that my wife is a state school teacher. Because of her experience, especially in reception and primary classes, I have some knowledge of some of the reasons that lie behind the Government's arguments justifying the Bill.

It is true that, in certain circumstances, the size of a class can have an effect on the ability of the teacher to control it and provide good-quality education for the pupils in his or her care. During the general election campaign, when the matter first came up for discussion, I was much taken by Ofsted's report on the issue. It made it clear that it was the quality of education that counted above all else—it was the quality of the teaching rather than the absolute number of pupils in a class.

I watched on the parliamentary television link earlier as the Minister refused to give the Committee any information in answer to specific questions. I oppose the clause standing part of the Bill because we have no idea of the effects of the measure. It is like me giving a friend a blank cheque and telling him to go away and fill in the details later, hoping that my account will have the balance to stand it.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have sought information about the effects of the clause and argued that the scheme should not cease to have effect. They have been trying to elicit answers about finances. I am amazed that any Minister should come before a Committee unable to do better than say that, if the clause had effect, he might have £100 million by the end of the Parliament. The fact that he is unable to give us details of the phased release of the money, unable to give us details of how the money would be given to local authorities and unable to give us an assurance that the money would find its way directly to primary school classrooms is—or, to be grammatically correct, are—three good reasons why the clause should not stand part of the Bill.

The Government claim to have an interest in the people of Britain, but the little people of Britain will lose out as a result of the clause. I remember meeting Mr. and Mrs. Smith—they are real people—when I lived in Southport 15 years ago. Ellen Smith used to go out and do cleaning jobs to earn enough money to add to her husband's salary of £8,500 so that they could make their contribution to the assisted place for their bright son to go to Merchant Taylors' school in Liverpool. Those are the people whom the Labour party might at one time have thought of as their natural supporters, but the clause is designed to trample on the Ellen Smiths of this world and their children and deny them the choice and opportunity that allowed that young man go on to obtain a first-class degree at university. The Southport area did not have all the options that the Minister may tell me there might be in his brave new world of education.

[Mr. Michael Jack]

I acknowledge that there is some logic in the Bill from the Minister's point of view. However, before the election, I asked my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) about the scheme. She wrote to me last November, saying that officials in the Department for Education and Employment had calculated a net saving of £34 million, not taking into account any capital expenditure that would have to be made on secondary schools to accommodate those pupils not going on the assisted places scheme.

I kept that letter with me until a public meeting on the subject during the election campaign. When I pulled out the Minister's letter, which I had treasured for the occasion, and quoted the figure, my Labour opponent—this gave us an idea of the arrogance of the Government—said, "You're wrong. You can't believe Government figures." The same officials are now advising the Minister. He is already disagreeing with his officials, and a representative of his party says that the official figures are wrong.

I asked the Labour candidate for his figures. He said that the saving would be £68 million, which would buy 2,300 extra teachers. He must have been right on that, because all Labour candidates were programmed to give the right answer about the assisted places scheme and therefore the effects of the clause. A quick division of that figure by the approximately 100 education authorities around the country led me to believe that there would be all of 23 extra teachers, on average, per authority.

I challenged my opponent to guarantee that the plan would enable Labour to deliver on its pledge for smaller class sizes. No answer came. If the Minister wants to convince me that the clause should stand part of the Bill—I do not expect him to give me a detailed answer now, because that would be asking too much in the light of his track record during the debate—will he, in the spirit of open government and making information available, put in the Library a detailed breakdown analysis?

8.15 pm

Half the work has been done for the Minister. There have been answers to parliamentary questions showing class sizes by local education authority. What is missing is information on how many teachers would be needed in each education authority to fix the problem. If clause 1 is passed, the Government will be able to get hold of some money to fix the problem. Perhaps the Minister will tell us, in a written answer or a statement placed in the Library, how the scheme will work. I do not think that they can deliver on their promise.

We do not know how the money will be released, how it will be allocated to local authorities and whether it will ever reach the schools that it is intended to reach.

Mr. Clappison: Perhaps I can help my right hon. Friend. Some research was done before the election, showing that the cost of employing the teachers required to reduce class sizes by the necessary amount was about £68 million. By some miracle, that was the figure repeated by the Labour candidates as the anticipated savings. Now that the Labour party has come into government, I have asked the same question, and the answer has vanished. They cannot now say what the cost will be.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful for that contribution. The Minister should go back to the author of the information and inquire. The Committee is being invited to endorse the clause. We ought to have the information if we are to do so. How can we judge the validity of the measure without it?

Mr. Steen: Am I right in thinking that the money saved from the scheme will go to primary schools, but the savings will come from assisted places for children going to secondary schools?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend brings me neatly to a second area of concern—another reason why I do not believe that the assisted places scheme as defined in the clause should cease to have effect. Let me go back to the letter that I received from my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham. I was anxious to discover the relationship between the amount spent on secondary schools through the standard spending assessment formula and the costs of the assisted places scheme.

My hon. Friend made it clear that I could not make a one-to-one comparison, because the money that went through the standard spending assessment formula did not take into account capital and other expenses, but there was a relationship. I was surprised by how close the cost of an assisted place was to the amount of money allocated to secondary schools in Lancashire under the standard spending assessment. I could not understand how Lancashire education authority would find any extra money to reduce primary school class sizes. Unfortunately—perhaps this is a comment against me—Lancashire is towards the top of the table for class sizes.

We could have a debate on classroom assistants and other matters, but you would rightly bring back to order, Mr. Martin, so I shall not. The Minister said nothing about where Lancashire would find the extra money to deliver smaller class sizes when the education authority would be busy paying the money to the secondary schools, almost pound for pound.

It is incumbent on the Minister, if he wants the Committee to allow clause 1 to stand part, to convince us with some detail. It is rank arrogance for him to say that he will have the money by the turn of the century and that everything will be all right. Governments do not operate with blank cheques, and he knows that, when he presents his proposal to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury, the Treasury officials—I know this, as, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), I have been there—will crawl over it and will have him for breakfast, lunch and tea unless he has the detail. The Minister is new to the job so I am giving give him fair warning that he needs that amount of detail.

My third concern relates to the state schools in my constituency for which I have fought tirelessly and for which I eventually won large sums of money to assist them in their expansion.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): A real hero.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his acknowledgement of my singular efforts in that regard.

I shall carry on fighting because I believe in choice and diversity and I think that all schools require the right resources to deliver education to our children. I shall fight for my state schools as hard as I shall for any other schools in my constituency. Those schools, however, would be the first to tell me that, because they did so well under the previous Government and because they are attractive schools, they are already bulging at the seams and struggling to meet demand. Where is the money coming from in Lancashire to expand those schools?

Mr. Forth: In case anyone should doubt what my right hon. Friend is saying, I should point out that I was the recipient of his assiduous and almost unending lobbying on behalf of schools in his constituency when I had the privilege to serve in the Department for Education and Employment. In case some newly elected colleagues imagine that what my right hon. Friend is saying is a routine or ritual statement, I happily confirm that he was indeed assiduous and persistent and very often, I am happy to say, successful in promoting the interests of state schools in his constituency.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for acknowledging and underpinning the thrust of my argument. That leads me to a further strand of thinking on the subject and another reason why I do not want clause 1 to stand part. I want to make certain that the existing legislation remains in effect.

Mr. Maude: On the issue of where state schools will get the money from to accommodate children displaced from the independent system by the abolition of the assisted places scheme, will my right hon. Friend confirm that, under the proposal, successful schools that are already full to capacity will have to accept more children as a result of displacement and that the effect will be yet more destruction—in this case, the destruction of choice because more places will be taken up by default? Is that not yet more reckless damage caused by this irresponsible Government?

Mr. Jack: My right hon. Friend is correct. I wish that he could have been with me during the general election campaign. I remember walking along one particular road alongside the Royal Lytham golf club. It comprised a terrace of modest houses. A lady said that she wanted to talk to me about education, and I thought that I was going to get a right earful. She was a single mother worried about assisted places. She was a woman of modest means trying to do the best for her son and his future. I put our arguments to her, and I trust that she listened. That is the human dimension that the Minister of the people's party chooses to scorn. To put it bluntly, to judge from his performance so far, the Minister could not care less about some of the people whom his party claims to represent.

I now develop my next line of thought. The Government have established a task force comprising Professor Brighouse and Mr. Woodhead. There will be a head-to-head confrontation, and I am sure that tickets will sold. It will be interesting to see what happens. However, I accept its establishment in the right spirit and believe that it is intended to improve standards. It is as though the Government have adopted a Pontius Pilate approach—they wash their hands of decisions and pass them on to other people. That is the route that they have chosen.

In the event of the task force—this august body—concluding that teaching standards and resources for teachers would contribute more to children's education at primary level than the abolition of the assisted places scheme, would the Minister be prepared to recognise that, if he gets the money, he may have other calls on it and therefore might not be able to deliver on primary school class size reductions? If the Minister is to be true to the Chancellor's edict that he stay within his departmental spending limit, I have a feeling in my bones that the money is not necessarily destined for the place about which the Minister has told us.

My final argument picks up a point already made by right hon. and hon. Friends and relates to a very real worry. In the last financial year, the county of Lancashire last year chose to keep back some £10 million of the additional funding provided by the former Government. The Government gave £26.3 million extra to Lancashire, but only £16 million reached the schools. The issue of class sizes in Lancashire could have been dealt with had the local authority remitted all the money to primary schools. Clause 1 should not stand part, because it provides no guarantee that the money will reach the schools.

There is a breathtaking lack of detail in the legislation. The research paper prepared by the Library contains the following sentence:

"Until the White Paper is published, no detail of the proposal is available although areas which might appear to require legislation include a duty on LEAs or governing bodies to reduce class sizes".

Even if the money gets where it is supposed to, we do not know that anyone will have to do anything with it, but the Minister is asking the Opposition and the Committee to agree to clause 1 stand part without providing any of the detail that he needs to win his argument.

Mr. Nicholls: I should like briefly to develop a theme that my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) mentioned a moment ago and to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) referred. It concerns the missing ingredient in the clause stand part debate.

We have all been trying to understand the justification for the Bill. There is a great temptation to assume that the reasons for the proposals have something to do with the reasons advanced from the Dispatch Box. However, it does not work like that. If we are being asked to accept that the unhappy price of getting rid of the assisted places scheme is that there will be a great deal more money to spend on dealing with overcrowded classrooms, which is supposed to be the justification for this squalid little measure, it simply does not stand up.

My hon. Friend for South Hams gave us details from his own constituency—

Mr. Steen: For Totnes.

Mr. Nicholls: And Totnes, too. He asked the valid question, where were the 1,100 pupils currently on the scheme going to go? The short and brutal answer is that they will go into the existing classrooms of schools in his constituency. The idea that one can do an arithmetical calculation using figures plucked figures out of the air and disseminated to every Labour candidate, saying, "Voilà"—as we are supposed to say in these

[Mr. Nicholls]

communautaire times, and probably in German, too—and that, suddenly, all the extra classrooms, the 23 or so teachers and equipment will materialise is complete nonsense. It is patently obvious that if a child who is currently being educated in the independent sector joins the maintained sector, an extra cost is placed on the maintained sector. It is not true that the state sector has a monopoly on economic excellence. If it is to cost money to educate a child in the independent sector, it will cost money to educate him in the state sector.

Mr. Steen: I have entered the debate because I am desperately worried about where the 1,011 children in Devon who are seeking assisted places every year will go. Is my hon. Friend aware that a number of schools in my constituency have limited the number of children they can take every year? In 1989, the Totnes Kevick school—the former grammar school—persuaded the then Secretary of State to place a limit of 240 on the number of children who could enter each year. Other schools all over the country have the same limits, under which they cannot, by law, take any more pupils. If that is so, the situation in Devon will be extremely serious.

8.30 pm

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. As I have already told the hon. Gentleman, interventions should be much shorter.

Mr. Nicholls: I understand what you are saying, Mr. Martin. Equally, I understand the passion of my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen).

Some people will say that the class sizes in my hon. Friend's constituency are too large. If time allowed—and it may—we could talk about the significance of class sizes. We could have a debate about the fact that excellence in teaching is far more important than mere class size. Many people would say that class sizes in Devon are already too large. I shall give my hon. Friend an answer to his question. He may feel personal grief as the Member of Parliament for that constituency, but it is not his responsibility. The 1,011 children will go into classrooms that are, for the most part, already full.

If we are looking for justification for this nasty, poisonous Bill, we can see that it has nothing to do with excellence or choice in education or enhancing options for people. In short, it has nothing to do with money or class size.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech and I simply wish to add to it and to ask him a question. When he looked at the league tables to see which schools were scoring highest, he will have noticed that a large number had class sizes well above the number that Labour Members maintain are necessary for success. My children attend a grant-maintained school that was 75th in the country and has class sizes that would be unacceptable according to the scales advocated by the Labour party. League table results are linked to the quality of teaching, not necessarily to the number of pupils in each class.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The clause relates to assisted places and their abolition, not class sizes.

Mr. Nicholls: I accept what my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) says. I remember a curious incident during the election campaign. I went to see the headmaster of a school in my constituency that featured highly in the league tables to ask him whether he found that numbers in his school were being depleted as a result of the assisted places scheme. He told me that they were not.

I said that, given the class sizes of his school, he must find that the assisted places scheme drew away his pupils. He replied, "No." He said that in his classrooms children sat in rows and were taught by a teacher who thought that it was his job to teach children, not to get them into little informal groups and ask them how they should be educated. The headmaster found that, even with class sizes that Labour Members would find unacceptable, the assisted places scheme was not a threat to the numbers in his school, because of the teaching methods used there.

If we were trying to justify the measure and the clause, we would not say that they related to money—they cannot. The economic arguments do not stack up. In some ways, the situation is even worse. It sounds such a good idea to say to the public that the money saved will go directly into the classroom, but it does not work that way in practice. Insiders involved in government or local government know that it does not work like that. We do not ring-fence money in that way.

The idea that the Minister will pick up the money and say that he is to send it down to the schools in our constituencies is not right—that is not how it is done. If there were to be a saving—and there will not be—it would go to the Treasury coffers to be disbursed through the standard spending assessment and the like. Even if there were to be a saving, the money would not go to the schools in that way.

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Mr. Nicholls: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, but his intervention must be on the subject of the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The money saved on the APS presents another problem. Successful schools are popular and there is pressure on their class sizes. Are we saying that the local authorities, many of which have opposed those schools and the way in which they have been set up, will redirect more money to them and leave the other schools with a bad feeling? Or will they blanket the money across all the schools to no purpose?

Mr. Nicholls: Who knows? I suspect that the money will be spread across the whole lot. I hope that my hon. Friend can expand on that point in more detail in his own contribution.

Mr. Steen: I am sure that my hon. Friend will remember this incident—knowing how assiduous he is, I am sure that he was present at the time. I do not know how many of my other hon. Friends will recall it, as very few of them were Members of Parliament when the Conservatives were in government.

I asked the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), whether she would ring-fence money on education so that it could be applied exclusively to a particular school activity in Devon. She said that that

could not be done without primary legislation. If that is so, can my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) explain how the money realised from the abolition of the APS can go to the schools without primary legislation?

Mr. Nicholls: It cannot be done. Under the present system and the funding of local authorities there is no way in which the money could be ring-fenced. My hon. Friend mentioned primary legislation. Perhaps he thinks that the Government, who have shown such breathtaking arrogance and contempt for parliamentary procedures, can pass the primary legislation that is necessary in double-quick time. But that cannot happen. The Minister is terrified of the idea of ring fencing. If we ever reach a situation whereby parcels of money can be ring-fenced for anything, every daft group in the country will say to the Labour Government, "You used to be one of us and we want you to fund our particular concern." The Camden lesbian refuge will say, "We want some money ring-fenced for us."

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman is drifting wide of the clause.

Mr. Nicholls: There will be no assisted places for ladies in that category in Camden, because one cannot ring-fence sums of money in that way—the system would not work.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that the extra money that my LEA might get may provide a solution to the problem in Gloucestershire? The average expenditure per primary and secondary school pupils is about half that of the highest level of expenditure in London. Therefore, I may be able to argue with the Government that, according to their logic, they should give my LEA more money for the schools.

Mr. Nicholls: When my hon. Friend debates the APS with the Government, I wish him luck, but I am not sure that he will be successful. Conservative Members may try to give a new incoming Government the benefit of the doubt. We make the mistake of arguing against the proposition in the terms in which it is put to us. We have spent much time this evening considering the detail of the money that will be available to reduce class sizes in other schools, but there is no point in considering that, for two reasons. The first is that the money is not there and the second is that it was never intended that it should be.

The explanation for the introduction of the legislation does not lie in class sizes or money, but in one particular word. I hope that it is not unparliamentary and I shall stand corrected if it is. That word is socialism. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I am quite happy to withdraw the word if necessary, Mr. Martin. I gather from your silence, however, that I am still allowed to use it in this House. The explanation for this measure is socialism.

The Government's problem is that they have come to power on a Conservative agenda. They have taken our values and our policies, but what are they to offer their Members of Parliament to keep them happy? How on earth are they to control 450 of them while they continue with their "Torier than thou" attitude? They have had to come up with one or two measures, such as this one, dressed up to look reasonable but actually generated by something else.

The Government's policy on assisted places cannot be reconciled with logic or economic sense, but it is justifiable in terms of socialism. This is a highly socialist measure—

Mr. Maude: I agree with what my hon. Friend has been saying. I draw his attention to what the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said on Second Reading, when he actually used the word:

"In short, it is a socialist Bill and as such it has my support."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. 35.]

Mr. Nicholls: That is interesting. The right hon. Gentleman has always been an engaging and cheerful speaker; now he reveals himself to be an honest one, too. This measure is no more designed to assist children than the abolition of fox hunting will be designed to assist foxes. The latter is another measure that will be thrown to Labour Back Benchers as a good socialist idea.

The Bill represents the abolition of choice—making it impossible for people who cannot afford education in the independent sector to get it via the direct grant system or by way of the assisted places scheme. The result is one-way traffic in the system. During the election campaign, it was often said that the scheme was designed to assist the rich. Far from it. Someone has to live on very modest means to get a place on the scheme, and rightly so.

The idea that everyone who can afford private education in the independent sector procures it is nonsense. I know many people who can certainly afford to send their children to boarding school but choose not to do so. They take the view that it would not be right for their children, and that they want to educate them in the state sector—

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The Prime Minister, for instance.

Mr. Nicholls: I shall come to him shortly. These people have the means to afford an independent education but have opted instead for day schools in the maintained sector.

The logic of the Labour party's position—it might once have been associated more with the Conservative party—is that, if people have the money, the Government do not mind if they spend it on private education; but if they do not have the money, the Government will make sure that they get no private education.

There is a certain irony in the fact that the Bill, socialist measure though it is, has been introduced by a party whose leader, the Prime Minister, did not have to rely on the assisted places scheme for a private education. In fact, he came from the sort of background where it was taken for granted that he would be able to go into the independent sector. He also had the quality of mind, I gather, to qualify for a scholarship. How long will it be before, on egalitarian grounds, those who are bright enough to win scholarships will not be allowed to take them up?

8.45 pm

Mr. Steen: I do not want to delay my hon. Friend's brilliant speech, but I thought I might be able to help him. Was he present when the Secretary of State for Education and Employment said, in answer to a question from me,

[Mr. Steen]

that the assisted places scheme was not for the 40 per cent. with incomes under £10,000 a year; it was for Lloyd's underwriters and for women who had divorced with massive capital settlements? Not only is this a socialist measure; it is old socialism rearing its ugly head again.

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend is right to remind us of that extraordinary statement. Lloyd's has not had an easy time of it recently, but I still do not believe that any Lloyd's underwriter is earning less than £10,400 a year. Abolishing the assisted places scheme is a hangover from the old days when the Labour party used to campaign on the promise to abolish private education, even though the Labour hierarchy had often benefited from it. No longer can Labour promise to do that, because the European convention on human rights states that abolishing religious education is illegal. So now Labour has to live with private education, but the Government intend to ensure from now on that the very people whom they are supposed to represent and who cannot afford such education by any other means will be made to suffer.

Not a single child will benefit from this legislation. No child who would have been able to join his brother or sister in a particular school will benefit from it, either; and people will not even be able to draw comfort from the idea that class sizes have declined or that teacher numbers have risen. In a sedentary heckle earlier this evening, perhaps prompted by one of those pagers that gives Labour Members their information, it was even suggested that, if something is good for the majority, what happens to the minority does not matter. That is an extraordinary statement for any party with pretensions to government.

Burke and a hundred other commentators through the ages have all agreed on the difference between democracy and mob rule. The essence of democracy is the protection of minority rights, not the extinguishing of minority rights.

Mr. Hayes: Given my hon. Friend's obvious breadth of reading and intellect, would he care to wax lyrical at somewhat greater length on the tensions between liberty and equality?

Mr. Nicholls: I would indeed, but only, Mr. Martin, in relation to the assisted places scheme—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. This is a serious matter and we must debate the clause.

Mr. Nicholls: I hope that I have been doing that, Mr. Martin. I shall not be tempted by my hon. Friend's eloquence on this occasion.

Whatever else unites or disunites us, we all want to do the very best for our children. It would be one thing if a parent could say that his child's class size had decreased as a result of a manifest unfairness being wrought on his neighbour. He might say to himself, "If the price of my child's smaller class is taking away someone else's rights, knocking away the ladder of opportunity and narrowing elitism, that is a price that has to be paid to ensure more teachers for my child's school." Such an argument is conceivable and would at least be understandable. But this Bill will not even achieve that, and it is not designed to help a single child. It is illogical and it makes no fiscal sense. It is all about telling Labour Members, before whom I gaily scatter my pearls, "We may pretend to be Tories but there is some socialist blood left in us yet."

Mr. Byers *rose—*

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Byers: Oh, dear. I am sorry.

We have had a very helpful debate on whether the clause should stand part of the Bill, which allowed Members to address more freely issues that we were unable to address in relation to amendments tabled to clause 1. I want to address issues that Opposition Members have raised in the clause stand part debate. It is the appropriate time to do so. It would have been inappropriate to do so on a narrowly focused debate on deferring the measures for three years. I hope that, in the time available to me, I can answer the questions that Opposition Members have asked, because significant issues have been raised concerning the thrust of the measure.

More than £1 billion has been spent on the assisted places scheme since its introduction. The issue before the House tonight is the reordering of priorities. Opposition Members have made their priorities clear, as they are entitled to, and have said that their priorities are to protect the assisted places scheme and the 40,000 or so people who benefit from it. Our priority is to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. That is where opinion in the House divides.

Mr. Clappison: On priorities, may I have a straight answer to the following question? Does the Minister maintain that the savings from the phasing out of the assisted places scheme will be sufficient to pay for a reduction in class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, or will other be money be needed? Will the savings be sufficient—yes or no?

Mr. Keith Simpson: Maybe.

Mr. Byers: Not maybe. I was coming to that, but as the hon. Gentleman raised it, I shall do so now.

Opposition Members referred to an independent work commissioned for the National Foundation for Educational Research on the cost of reducing class sizes, and to work commissioned by ISIS from the Institute of Public Finance. Those two reports differed enormously in their conclusions as to costings, but there is one cost on which they agree—a cost of £65 million to reduce class sizes of five, six and seven-year-olds to 30 or fewer. I am confident that, within the £100 million savings that we shall make by the year 2000, we shall deliver on that commitment and that, in addition, we shall have more funding available, in addition to the £65 million, to meet any additional costs that would arise from taking the 10,000 or so pupils a year who will not be going on the assisted places scheme but who will instead enter the maintained sector.

Our approach in government contrasts markedly with the approach of the Conservative Government. In the past 10 years, 450,000 additional pupils entered the maintained sector, while the number of teachers dropped by 6,000.

Mr. Jack: Last November, officials of the Department for Education and Employment confirmed by letter to me

a saving effectively a third less than the figure that the Minister has quoted—I believe that it was £24 million to £68 million. What has changed since last November in the detailed methodology used to calculate those numbers? Although there has been a change of Government, I assume that officials give straight replies to Ministers, whichever Government are in power.

Mr. Byers: I am sure that officials do give straight replies to questions. As far as I am concerned, the information that we have given Opposition Members in replies to parliamentary questions reflects the fact that £100 million will be saved by the turn of the century. I cannot answer the right hon. Gentleman tonight about the precise method by which those figures are calculated, but I shall write and let him know the process that has been used by officials. I am confident that the officials who replied in November were impartial then, they will have been impartial in the parliamentary replies given in recent days.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Can the Minister give the House a categorical assurance that any school that encounters extra pupils as a result of the abolition of the assisted places scheme will not be financially worse off—that the school will be fully recompensed for those extra pupils?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman brings me to the points that I want to make about the White Paper, which we shall publish towards the end of June. If he can wait a few minutes, I shall try to address his concerns later, because the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) wants to intervene again.

Mr. Clappison: I appreciate the Minister's generosity in giving way again. The figures that he quoted from the NFER were an annual figure for teachers' salaries of between £60 million and £70 million. Those figures coincided with the Institute of Public Finance's assessment, without taking account of capital costs. Over two years, that amounts to teachers' salaries of £130 million without any capital costs, which is less than the sum that the Minister has told us will be saved—£100 million. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, on the figures he has given, the savings will not be sufficient? If he does know the costings, why did he not tell me so in the written answer?

Mr. Byers: I am afraid that the hon. Member is confusing two streams of finance—revenue and capital. The assisted places scheme is releasing revenue money, which we shall use for the benefit of teachers' salaries. As he is aware, capital is dealt with differently in terms of public expenditure.

Mr. Steen *rose—*

Mr. Duncan Smith *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I give way to the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), but then I must make some progress.

Mr. Steen: I am worried about only one issue. I have repeatedly asked this question: will the Minister give me an answer? In my county of Devon 1,011 children have assisted places. In my constituency, all the secondary schools are limited and full. What are we going to do with the 1,011 children on the assisted places scheme? Where will they go? Will more capital be available for building, and more grants of planning permission? How will we put those 1,011 children into secondary schools in Devon?

Mr. Byers: We have said that we shall publish a White Paper towards the end of June. It will address the specific issues regarding the way in which class sizes are to be reduced and the mechanism that we shall use, after consultation with the local education authorities, to achieve those class size reductions.

Mr. Maude *rose—*

Mr. Byers: I give way for the final time.

Mr. Maude: Will the Minister give an undertaking that the mechanism that he devises to ensure that infant class sizes are reduced will be used to ensure that no secondary school's class sizes are increased by pupils displaced from the assisted places scheme?

Mr. Byers: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. That is why we are committed to phasing out the assisted places scheme. Had we gone for straight abolition, there would have been the difficulties that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned. As we are phasing out the assisted places scheme, those difficulties will not arise.

I want to conclude by replying to two points that were made in the debate. Some independent schools are already making alternative provision. We very much welcome the steps that are being taken voluntarily by the independent sector to provide additional places, perhaps from bursaries and from their own finance. We feel that that is wholly appropriate and we have no difficulty with that approach. However, the reality is that the assisted places scheme is the ultimate opt-out. As the former Deputy Prime Minister said, it is an escape route for bright children from inner-city schools.

Mr. Clappison *rose—*

Mr. Byers: No, I will not give way.

We disagree with that approach. We want to raise standards in all our schools so that all our children benefit.

Conservative Members have talked about parental choice. The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) said that the essence of the assisted places scheme was to promote choice and to give choice to parents. A year ago, however, when she was a member of the Conservative Government, a leaflet was produced for parents about the APS, a part of which reads:

"How do I apply for a place"—

this is giving advice to a parent, and the leaflet reads clearly and starkly:

"Schools select pupils according to their own rules."

"Schools select pupils"—no parental choice. In other words, parental choice is a myth. I have quoted the Government's own words—"Schools select pupils".

Mrs. Gillan: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. I ask you to give me the benefit of your advice. At this stage

[Mrs. Gillan]

of our proceedings, when the Minister has intervened so prematurely, is it right that he should make remarks involving something that I did when I was a Minister and fail to give me the opportunity to intervene? I seek your advice in this instance, Mr. Martin.

The First Deputy Chairman: I can give the hon. Lady advice. The question that she raises is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Byers: Clause 1 stands at the heart of the Bill and it should stand—

Mr. Jack: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. I seek your guidance because it is clear to me, given the Minister's remarks, that there may be further contributions to the debate. Might we continue with the debate notwithstanding that the Minister has made a somewhat premature entry to our proceedings?

The First Deputy Chairman: I can only say to the hon. Member: let the Chairman chair the Committee.

Mr. Byers: Clause 1 will reduce class sizes—

Mr. Clappison: On a point of order, Mr. Martin.

The First Deputy Chairman: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr. Clappison: Indeed it is, Mr. Martin.

May I seek your advice, on the figures that the Minister has put before the Committee as to the cost—*[Interruption.]* If those figures are at variance with the Minister's written answer, might the Minister have the opportunity to correct the figures in that written answer? Might he now deal with costs and tell us how much the Government's proposals will cost? Should not the Minister be given the chance—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The Minister is responsible for his comments, and what he says is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Byers: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Clause 1 will reduce class sizes for the 440,000 five, six and seven-year-olds. I commend the clause to the Committee.

Mr. David Jamieson (Plymouth, Devonport) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I should explain that the monitor is not correct. The Committee is dividing on the closure. That fact should be placed on the record. The Question is, that the Question be now put.

The Committee proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Martin.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I have made a judgment. I merely put on record the fact that the monitor was wrong so that the House authorities might correct it.

Mr. Duncan *(seated and covered):* On a point of order, Mr. Martin. May we start the Division again because the television screens in the Palace of Westminster were clearly wrong and colleagues were misled?

The First Deputy Chairman: Those who were in the Chamber knew what the Division was about.

Mr. Duncan *(seated and covered):* Further to that point of order, Mr. Martin. Those who are outside the Chamber are guided by the monitors. Hon. Members outside were misled by what they saw on the screens.

The First Deputy Chairman: I can worry only about what goes on inside the Chamber. The fact of the matter is that the Division Bells rang when I announced a Division. It is up to hon. Members to come to the Chamber and discover what is going on. They can make their own judgment as to how they wish to vote, or they may decide to abstain. It is entirely up to them. The monitors are only an aid for hon. Members; they are not a necessity.

The Committee having divided: Ayes 306, Noes 52.

Division No. 16] **[9 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*

Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oiner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Arbuthnot, James
Bercow, John
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Colvin, Michael
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Eric
Gale, Roger
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Green, Damian
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Nicholls, Patrick
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Ruffley, David

St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilshire, David
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and
Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mrs. Gillan: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. Is it right, after so many Conservative Members have sat solidly in the Chamber throughout the debate so far—unlike Labour Members, whose Benches have been empty for most of the debate—for the Government to show the arrogance that attaches to such a large majority, using the many to stifle the voices of the few? Does not such arrogance threaten the democratic process of legislation in the House, and prevent hon. Members with genuine constituency interests who have sat here for hour after hour from expressing the views of their constituents?

The First Deputy Chairman: The subject was fully aired and the amendments and clause were fully debated. The Government's majority has nothing to do with the Chair.

Question put accordingly, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 306, Noes 39.

Division No. 17] **[9.25 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oiner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris

Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and Mr. Greg Pope.

NOES

Bercow, John
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Eric
Gale, Roger
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hayes, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Nicholls, Patrick
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
St Aubyn, Nick
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Swayne, Desmond
Tyrie, Andrew
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilshire, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR EXISTING ASSISTED PUPILS

9.45 pm

Mrs. Gillan: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 1, line 24, after 'school', insert 'and their siblings'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 24, in clause 5, page 4, line 40, after 'year', insert

'or the siblings of any such pupil'.

Mrs. Gillan: Having witnessed today's display by Labour Members, I do not suppose that they will be very interested in amendments Nos. 9 and 24. They have shown that they are not interested in stopping and thinking about the Bill's implications and, sadly, I do not believe that they will take any notice of the points that we are attempting to make by tabling this group of amendments. Although our amendments affect only a very few people, I urge the Minister to consider them very carefully. Nevertheless, I expect that the Government will treat those few people with the same contempt as they are treating all the other families whose children could have been part of the assisted places scheme, had it been allowed to continue.

The Bill will deprive brothers and sisters of the opportunity to attend the same school and of continue their education in the secondary school that they could reasonably have expected to attend. Our amendments, however, would allow siblings to take an assisted place if one is offered, which would be the fair and equitable action of a generous and fair minded Government.

In the Government's offerings to date, it has been obvious to the Opposition that Ministers are remote from the people who will be affected by the Bill. In moving amendment No. 9, I shall attempt to bring Ministers a little closer to the people they will be hurting, because, in their arrogant rush to introduce this very poor legislation, they are hurting families across the United Kingdom.

I have spoken to people associated with the assisted places scheme, and they have provided me with several examples of families who will be bitterly affected by the Bill. I have permission, with one or two exceptions, to use the names of those families, because I think that the Government must answer directly to the citizens who will be so badly disadvantaged by the Bill. I will, therefore, cite some case histories. They are not fictitious case histories, but stories of real people who will suffer because of this Bill.

Mrs. Penny Brayley is a single parent with two daughters, aged 12 and 15, on assisted places at Edgehill college in Devon. There has been a massive improvement in their academic performance since they took up their assisted places. Mrs. Brayley has also a 10-year-old son, called Benjamin, who, possibly in September 1998, would have taken up an assisted place at the same school as his sisters. Under the Bill, there will be no possibility of Benjamin joining his sisters. I hope that the Minister will think about Benjamin as this Bill is rammed through the House in a quite undemocratic way.

Another citizen of this country has two daughters on assisted places at Talbot Heath school, one aged 12 and the other 10. The 12-year-old will be able to continue

[Mrs. Gillan]

at the school until she finishes her A-levels at 18. The 10-year-old, who had a difficult time at her state primary school, has now taken up her assisted place at Talbot Heath and is extremely happy. She will be forced to make a painful and traumatic return to the state sector in one year's time. I ask the Minister to think about that child as she takes the Bill through.

Mrs. Anna James has a son on an assisted place, studying for his GCSEs at Haberdasher's Aske's boys school. She has a daughter aged 10 who has set her heart on attending the sister school, Haberdasher's Aske's girls school, in September 1998. I hope that the Minister will be able to look that child in the eye and explain to her why she cannot join her brother. That is the effect of this Bill. *[Interruption.]* The Ministers are sitting there laughing. That is the arrogance of this Government, who could not care less what happens to those children as a result of the Bill.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is talking about my constituents. They are not alone. There are a number of such cases at Haberdasher's Aske's school. My constituents and other parents at the school will be listening to this debate with great interest. They will want to hear a serious response from the Minister.

Mrs. Gillan: I am glad that my hon. Friend intervened. It is obvious from the smug look on the Minister's face that he could not care less about these children. I find that appalling.

Mr. James Tester has a seven-year-old son, Miles, who will start at Ardingly college on an assisted place this September—thanks to the Labour party agreeing, before the election, that I could continue with the programme. When Mr. Tester's son was offered the place, he had no hesitation in accepting, because his understanding was that his son could retain his assisted place at Ardingly until the age of 18 or, at the very least, 13. The Bill will prevent that. If Mr. Tester had known that his son would have to suffer the disruption of a return to the state sector at the age of 11, he would hot have accepted the assisted place.

The Government have already rejected our amendments to take more time in abolishing the scheme because they do not care what happens to Miles or about the disruption they are causing children and their families.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): My hon. Friend is aware of the Ursuline college in my constituency. She has been helpful to the school in the past. She knows that it has a modest number of assisted places. As a convent school, it takes children from quite large families. It will be a bitter disappointment to them that their brothers and sisters will not be able to attend the same school. Surely a fundamental principle of our education system is that siblings are enabled to be educated together. Is not the Government's attitude disgraceful and sheer spite?

Mrs. Gillan: I know of the school. My hon. Friend has made an excellent point. Families do not consist of just 2.4 children plus a dog, but of perhaps three, four or five siblings. The implementation of the Bill will set brother against brother and sister against sister.

I do not want to delay the Committee for too long, but I feel strongly that Ministers have taken the Bill as a bit of a joke so far. The Minister who replied to the debate on the previous group of amendments took little notice of our reasonable questions, and did not answer them. A responsible Minister would have taken the issues that we have raised into consideration before introducing the Bill. I do not hold out much hope that the Minister—a different Minister—who is to reply to this group of amendments will take the debate any more seriously.

I should like to read a letter sent to my right hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State for Education and Employment from Mrs. Ann Nourse. She writes:

"My personal big concern about this Government is the discontinuance of new Assisted Places after the September 1997 intake. Mr. Blunkett has given no thought to the effect this action will inevitably have on the siblings of Assisted Place holders.

My elder son Philip is a shining example of what Assisted Places were introduced for. He is predicted to achieve straight As at GCSE this summer. My other son is 5½ years younger and wants nothing more than to attend the same school as Philip. Matthew goes to everything with us at school. He sees the high standard of concerts and drama and sports events. He even helps out at the Nearly-news and Christmas Fairs. He's involved with the school already. He was going to start in year 1 in September '98."

Ministers are not evening listening to the letter. They are just chatting away to each other. Mrs. Nourse goes on:

"It seems very likely that I will have to explain that his hopes will be dashed. That he won't get an equal opportunity to Philip. He's going to be very upset and disappointed and could carry it with him for the rest of his life.

Many siblings up and down the country are going to feel like Matthew. I can see it breeding ill-will, envy and resentment in families between brothers and sisters.

My elder son Philip thinks it's so unfair on his younger brother.

Labour are ignoring the 3 years notice that should have been given which would have given more chance for siblings to be treated equally. This is all being introduced so rapidly it doesn't seem right."

She goes on to say:

"Please would it be possible for you to table an amendment to the Education Bill whereby siblings of Assisted Place holders would also be offered Assisted Places beyond September 1997. Even if it was only for the next three years—the length of time that schools should receive in notice, should either side want to opt out . . . This would help a lot of children and families.

Even if these unfortunate children could be allowed a grant equivalent to the cost of their education in the state system, it would help some children to gain an equal education to their siblings.

The feelings of these children are being totally disregarded by Mr. Blunkett, could you not appeal to his better nature?

I should be so grateful if you could take up the plight of the siblings of Assisted Place holders please, Mrs. Shephard."

We have taken up the amendment that Mrs. Nourse asked for. Now is the chance for the Government to prove that they are not so arrogant and can listen to the voices of Mrs. Nourse, Mr. Tester, Mrs. James and Mrs. Brayley. They should think hard about the children they will affect with the Bill, but I see no sign of it and I am deeply worried about the future of a Government who can disregard children in such a cavalier fashion.

I find it hard to believe that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), who I know to be a kind and understanding person, can sit there and let the clause go through without the amendment being accepted. I hope that she will accept the amendment in the spirit in which it was tabled.

I firmly believe that any Minister who had any regard for the welfare of children would accept that it is a reasonable amendment, tabled with the best intentions to ensure that the very examples that I have laid before the Committee do not become a reality. That is a horror story for the families involved. I have no children, but I can imagine having two who are—

It being Ten o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *left the Chair to report progress and ask leave to sit again.*

Committee report progress.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Education (Schools) Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

The House divided: Ayes 302, Noes 39.

Division No. 18] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Maliaber, Ms Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha

Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and Jane Kennedy.

NOES

Bercow, John
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Cash, William
Clappison, James
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Eric
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hayes, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Paterson, Owen
St Aubyn, Nick
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Walter, Robert
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Woodward, Shaun

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lidington and Mr. David Wilshire.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have an office in Dean's yard, which you know is about half a mile from here as the crow flies. I have worked in the Dean's yard vicinity for many years, and I rely on the television monitor to let me know when a Division takes place. Since the general election, however, that monitor seems to have been working differently.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): I am quite sure that the problem that the hon. Gentleman had did not interfere with the result of the debate, but I will have inquiries made.

Again considered in Committee.

10.15 pm

Mr. Steen: On a point of order, Mr. Lord. A moment ago, when you were Deputy Speaker, I explained that I was suffering from a problem, but I did not quite get to the problem. The problem was that the television monitor did not show that a Division was taking place, and although the bell could be heard if one was not hard of hearing, the television monitor disclosed the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) was still on her feet. If I had not been the person that I am, and had not realised that a Division was taking place, I would have missed it.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I have already told the hon. Gentleman that I will have inquiries made. I believe that that deals satisfactorily with that point of order.

Mrs. Gillan: It seems some time since I last spoke to this set of amendments but, despite the levity of the House in the past couple of minutes, I want to reiterate the seriousness of amendments Nos. 9 and 24 and ask the Minister to take on board the request that the Opposition are making: to ensure that there is not division between brother and brother, brother and sister, and sister and sister; to accept amendment No. 9; and to allow siblings to continue in an assisted places scheme.

The examples that I have given are not isolated. There are many families in such circumstances, although not all younger brothers and sisters would expect to take up an assisted place like their older brothers and sisters. I ask the Minister to investigate all the families currently in the assisted places scheme and at least to find out which families are affected by the Bill. If the Government truly care about the education of those children, they will look into the matter, and give hope to Mrs. Brayley, Mrs. Nourse, Mrs. James, Mr. Tester and many other families who will have to face the problem that the Government have caused for them.

I am not very hopeful, because, as I said earlier, and as was echoed around the Chamber from the Labour Benches, they are the Government for the many, not the few, and only a few children are affected by the Bill, so I would not expect the Government to take any notice.

Mr. Nicholls: One might have expected Labour Members to adopt their traditional role in this place and express concern during the debate for those who are not able to express concern for themselves. We heard in an earlier debate—

Mr. Hayes: Is not my hon. Friend being a trifle harsh on the Conservative party and current Conservative Members? After all, it was the Conservative party throughout the 19th century which looked after those who could not look after themselves. The Conservative party introduced a range of social reforms and benefits for working people in the face of opposition from the Liberals. When the Liberals were last in government, some of them were still willing to put boys up chimneys.

Mr. Nicholls: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. If time allowed—and it may—and if it were in order, it would be instructive to go through the social and education legislation introduced by Conservative Governments over the past century and a half. One has only to think of Disraeli's great education Act to recognise that my hon. Friend's argument is correct.

I am saying that the Conservative party cares about minorities and cares also about children. That notwithstanding, the popular belief—it is certainly the belief of those on the Government Benches, as was made clear during our debates on the Bill—is that Labour Members have the monopoly of compassion.

Mr. Flynn: Hear, hear.

Mr. Nicholls: With a sedentary interjection—unfortunately, not a maiden one—a Labour Member claims that monopoly of compassion.

There are times when it is possible to act and not merely use the rhetoric of compassion. When my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) was setting out a number of cases—not manufactured ones—involving individuals throughout the country who had written to her, stating in a direct and personal way the effect that the Government's proposed legislation would have on them, the Minister who I believe will reply laughed. I find that remarkable.

We have our exchanges and, to be fair, we sometimes laugh at one another's speeches. That is a great parliamentary tradition, and there we are. It was interesting, however, that the Minister was not laughing in a good-natured way about a Conservative Member's speech. The mere idea that a child who had had an unfortunate experience in the state sector was to be transferred back there was in some way funny.

We must all have examples of children who were bullied in the state sector and bullied in the private sector as well. It is appalling when that happens. Those of us who have experienced it, or with children who have gone through it, know that it is not a matter for levity.

The marvellous feature of a society such as ours is that there is diversity in education. We do not talk about education in our constituencies as that which relates to the maintained sector alone. Education is much more diverse than that. There are great state schools as there are great private schools. All schools in their way can make an individual contribution.

There will be times, however—this implies no criticism of the schools concerned—when a child will be deeply unhappy in one school and will want to go to another. It is inevitable that within the maintained sector there will not be that degree of choice. We can hardly say that for every school there should be another one next door, on the off-chance that a child does not settle down in one or the other. However, there are difficulties, and at present there is usually an alternative, and one that will lie within the independent sector.

Most of us in this place can afford the option of the independent sector. That is fine. The Prime Minister, for example, was brilliant enough to get a scholarship to an independent school. That, too, is fine. It is fine also for those who can afford that education. We should not be concerned about looking after people such as ourselves—after all, we are all on the same salary. But what about those who cannot afford to exercise the option of enabling their children to go to a school where they will be content, able to settle down and able to be happy and secure enough to achieve their best potential?

Because this pernicious legislation has not yet gone through the House, there is an option—the child can take up an assisted place. That choice produces no excessive expenditure for the state. Replying to the previous debate, which was long and thoughtful, the Minister for School Standards, in an extraordinarily short and cursory speech, never tried to justify the idea that there was some saving to be made, because there is no massive saving to be made. It costs to educate a child, whether that takes place in the independent sector or in the maintained sector.

At present, there is the option for an independent school to have a child on an assisted place. That is to go. We have heard no argument that that has anything to do with money. It is possible, because naivety is a tendency that can extend right to the Benches of the House of Commons, that some hon. Members drifting into the debate tonight might have thought that there were no arguments to be made against the measure, and that it was a straightforward piece of socialist legislation dressed up in Tory clothing, which could be brushed to one side and flurried through the House of Commons just in time for them to catch the 7 o'clock train to the north country.

There must have been hon. Members who did not realise what might be at stake for individual children. They come into the Chamber and find that the Bill has no financial consequences, there are no savings, and no overcrowded schools in any of our constituencies will benefit from the passage of the Bill. Instead, they hear straightforward accounts of people who have no greater aspiration than to go to the same school as their brothers and sisters. There can hardly be—or there will not be for much longer—an hon. Member who has not received a letter from a parent—

Mr. Clappison: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not simply a matter of the time that children spend together in education? The choice of schools for siblings can affect the children and the relationships between them for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Nicholls: That is probably true. A school in the maintained sector may be particularly popular. The older child may go to that school, but the younger child will be offered another school because the first school is full. The natural response is to write to the local education authority, pointing out that the children are siblings.

Whatever disputes I sometimes have with my LEA, there have been several occasions when I have written to explain that, although the school of choice may be full and children are being sent to another nearby school, the children in question are brothers and sisters. To the credit of the LEA with which I have to deal, there has never been any difficulty with that. It has been perfectly understood. There is nothing irrational, wrong or misplaced in wanting to send a brother or sister to the same school as an older sibling.

That is how the present system works for the 95 or 96 per cent. of children who are educated in the maintained sector.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): The children may come from an inner-city school that is failing. If the older child is offered an assisted place at another school, the younger brother or sister will not be able to join the older sibling, unless the amendment is passed. Is it not correct that if every child was sent out of that failing school and it was closed, the Exchequer would save money? It costs more on the SSA to send a child to an inner-city school than the average cost of the assisted places scheme.

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend is right. As he is a gentle and fair-minded person, he does not mention the fact that the worst LEAs in the country are controlled by the Labour party.

Mr. Radice: No.

Mr. Nicholls: One might have expected some contrition from Labour Members—although perhaps not from the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice), who is an old Wykehamist—about the fact that the schools that people flee from are overwhelmingly those provided by Labour LEAs. Although the position might be at its most graphic in inner cities, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) pointed out, it happens all over the country.

We are dealing with nothing more nor less than the aspiration of parents to have their children educated in the school to which their siblings go, and the aspiration of children to go to the same school as their siblings. That is a perfectly straightforward situation which exists for the 96 per cent. of the population whose children are educated within the state sector.

10.30 pm

If there was a shred of principle behind the Bill—I freely accept that there is not—the Government would say, "Okay, perhaps we are simply not too good at figures, perhaps we really have not thought this through, but we have this vague waffly idea that in some way we might be able to release certain sums of money. However, when it comes to siblings, the siblings who are educated within the independent sector on the assisted places scheme should be treated in the same way as the siblings who are educated in the state sector."

Even if one accepted the so-called underlying premise of the Bill, that would be the position, but it is not. That is where the Bill's socialist credentials—to which the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has already paid tribute—come shining through in all their nastiness. It does not matter about the individual aspirations of parents and children.

The Minister of State, Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Richard Caborn): It does not matter.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Gentleman wants to put it on the record that children's individual aspirations do not matter. It does not matter that they want to be educated with their brothers and sisters—

Mr. Luff: On a point of order, Mr. Lord. I do not wish to pre-empt your judgment, but my understanding is that sedentary interventions are bad enough, but interventions made from beyond the Bar of the House are particularly unacceptable.

The Second Deputy Chairman: The hon. Gentleman can safely leave such matters to the Chair.

Mr. Nicholls: There we have it.

Mr. Brady: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not merely a matter of the aspirations of children and their parents, important though they are, but a matter of practicality? If one sibling already goes to a certain independent school, is not it a great practical problem for a hard-pressed working family to find a way of getting the other sibling to a school possibly very distant from that school when one child—

Mr. Caborn: There are always taxis.

Mr. Brady: That is all very well for those who can afford them. But I am speaking for—

Mr. Don Foster *rose*—

Mr. Brady: No, I am sorry—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. Hon. Members must resume their seat when I am on my feet. I take this opportunity to remind all hon. Members that interventions should be short and to the point. I appreciate that the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) is a new Member, and I am not addressing just him.

Mr. Brady: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Lord. I apologise for remaining on my feet.

Mr. Nicholls: I understand exactly my hon. Friend's point.

The spirit of Marie Antoinette is alive in this House. Once upon a time the cry was, "Let them eat cake." Now we have, "Let them take taxis." I did not know that the Labour party might be prepared to reconsider the case and provide taxis to take siblings to school. I had not expected that.

The point is perfectly straightforward. One could be in favour of the principle of the Bill while still saying that, out of sheer compassion, and practicality as well, for the few siblings—I shall come to the figures in a moment—an exception should be made.

Mr. Luff: Does not the sedentary intervention suggesting that children could take taxis demonstrate the real sentiment that drives the Government? They genuinely and sincerely believe that it is rich people who benefit from the assisted places scheme. They do not understand that it is the poor people who find it so difficult to meet the costs that will result from a refusal to accept the amendment.

Mr. Nicholls: My hon. Friend is entirely right. At this late hour, the problems of poor people and children who are suffering at school simply excite the insufferable arrogance of Labour Members.

I should like to know the numbers of children involved. We have heard nothing about that from the Minister; perhaps she will tell us when she winds up. I do not know how many children are involved, but I suspect that the numbers are small. If the numbers are small, the Government have even less justification for acting as they are doing. If, when the Minister winds up, she adopts the line that it is okay for people in the state sector to want to educate all their children together, but it is different for people who have chosen to use the independent sector—

if she says that, when she does not even know what the numbers are—that will say a great deal about the legislation.

The Bill will obviously be driven through the House at some hour, but we have heard nothing in the non-existent contributions from Labour Back Benchers—even from the old Wykehamists on those Benches—that justifies this piece of legislation. We have laid down the charge, in the debates on the Bill so far, that it has nothing to do with the interests of parents, children or education itself. We have charged that dogma seems to matter more than doing something to help.

It is time that we heard speeches from the Labour Back Benches. Labour Members will help to drive through a rotten, squalid, pernicious Bill, which we have shown to be bare of any shred of decency. I should have thought that a Government who are arrogant enough to drive through such a Bill might have found somebody arrogant enough to stand up and try to justify it.

Mrs. May: When my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) moved the amendments, I thought that she spoke movingly about the examples of how the Bill would affect children and families. It was disgraceful that the Ministers and others on the Government Benches chose to ignore the cases that my hon. Friend advanced; indeed, they laughed and talked among themselves. That shows either that they do not want to know the implications of the Bill or that they do not care.

Mrs. Gillan: I am glad that my hon. Friend takes as seriously as I do the examples that I tried to lay before the Committee. Does she agree that it is easy for Opposition Members to laugh because they would not qualify if they wished to send their children to independent schools—their incomes would be too high?

Mrs. May: My hon. Friend is right. That is the point that we have tried to make throughout the debates on the Bill, but Labour Members fail to understand that it genuinely is people on low incomes, poor and less privileged people, who benefit from the assisted places scheme. Those families and those children will be hard hit by the Bill, if it is passed, and by the abolition of the assisted places scheme.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing those cases into the debate, because until now we have talked mostly about statistics and numbers of children who would be affected in different constituencies and counties. It is right that we think about the impact that the Bill will have on families, especially on brothers and sisters, and the divisions that will occur if our amendments are not accepted.

Those of us who have been involved in setting admissions criteria for schools, either through the local education authorities or as governors of schools, know the importance that is always placed on the siblings issue. After social needs—or, if the school is a Church school, after religious needs—the siblings issue comes next in the admissions criteria. That is not just a fluke; it does not just happen that way. It is put next because of a general recognition by people involved in education—teachers, governors and parents—that it is important for brothers and sisters to be able to go to the same school. That is always a priority in the setting of criteria for the admission of children to particular schools.

The issue is to do with the relationships between children and within families, but—as my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) pointed out—it is also a practical issue. Parents do not want to have to take their children to different schools. We are talking not only about schools that may be physically separate, but—in the case of children who may attend state schools when their brothers or sisters are attending independent schools—about schools whose holiday dates and arrangements may be very different. That is particularly difficult for working families, who must ensure that they provide coverage while their children are on holiday.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Estelle Morris): Does the hon. Lady think that, in areas where there is a high degree of selection, and entry is normally on the basis of academic attainment, siblings should be given preference even if they would not normally reach the academic standards required by the schools in those areas?

Mrs. May: Admissions criteria in all schools are for those schools to set. I am saying that, normally, the sibling issue figures high on the admissions criteria, because of people's acceptance of the importance of, as far as possible, allowing brothers and sisters to go to the same school.

We accept that that is not always the case. Some children will go to single-sex schools, and their siblings—if they are of a different sex—will go to different schools. The criterion is, however, accepted as extremely important because of the impact on children within the family, and on the family as a whole. If the Government reject our amendments, they will be casting that to one side, and saying that they do not care about the impact on families. They will be saying that they do not care that families are divided in the way described so movingly by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham.

We know why that is. The reason for the legislation is nothing to do with the impact on children or the quality of the education offered to them. As the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said, this is a socialist Bill designed purely on the principle that, if everyone cannot have it, no one should.

Mr. Ian Bruce: What the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment said suggests that she has never seen children within a family. Surely children have the most direct belief in what is fair. If two children have an opportunity to go to grammar school, but one does not pass and the other does, they at least realise that the decision was fair. The hon. Lady seemed to be trying to ignore the fact that, if one child in a family has the opportunity to go to a separate school on an assisted places scheme, the denial of that opportunity must break up the belief in fairness within that family.

Mrs. May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When I saw the reaction of Ministers to the cases that my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham mentioned earlier, I was reminded of something that I saw in the newspaper yesterday about a proposal by the Prime Minister to open the doors of No 10 for a party. He said that there would be a fair number of "real people" there. I thought that an extremely patronising comment, but I

[Mrs. May]

am afraid that it is the tone adopted by the Government and, increasingly, the attitude of the Prime Minister. Having seen the reaction to the cases that have been mentioned, I wonder whether Government Front Benchers understand anything about "real people".

Mr. Jack: Did my hon. Friend feel that the intervention of the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment a few moments ago gave an indication of in-depth thinking and understanding in regard to the point that she was making?

Mrs. May: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It showed that the Government had not thought through the implications of the Bill and, on this issue, they certainly have not thought through the impact that it will have within families. That was illustrated clearly by the cases that were cited. They are not made-up stories; they are actual cases of families who say that they will have difficulties.

Mr. Lansley: My hon. Friend referred to admissions criteria. What will be the implication for siblings who are not able to follow their older brothers or sisters into a school on an assisted place? The younger siblings may not satisfy the admissions criteria of the school of their choice, so they may be doubly affected. They would not be able to exercise their choice by attending an independent school on an assisted place, and would not be able to enter the school of their choice in the maintained sector.

10.45 pm

Mrs. May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He has raised the valid issue of the way in which the Bill will further restrict parental choice. It is not just parental choice; the Bill also restricts the choice of children who want to go to the same school as their siblings but will be unable to do so.

Mr. Willis: I am intrigued by the hon. Lady's argument. During the general election campaign, the then Prime Minister went to great lengths to say that education policy under a new Tory Government would have a grammar school in every town, which would be centres of excellence. He said that people would aspire to go to those grammar schools through examination. Would the siblings policy that she proposes have applied to those grammar schools?

Mrs. May: I have already made the point about admissions criteria being up to individual schools. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the policy that we proposed at the general election was for a grammar school where parents wanted one. It was about parental choice.

Mr. Don Foster *rose—*

Mrs. May: I should like to get on to my next point, because I have raised it before and the Minister failed to address it.

Children are aided by assisted places if they have a social need to be given boarding school education. My question is particularly valid for families with two children with such social need. Under our amendment, if the first child already has an assisted place, the sibling would also be able to take an assisted place. I should be grateful for an answer to my question about social need.

The Minister for School Standards is no longer present. I was hopeful when he said earlier that he would deal with all the issues that had been raised, but he did not address any of them. My point is a valid one.

Mr. Flynn: The hon. Lady referred to the Minister's temporary absence. Can she convince us that this exercise is not an act of communal hypocrisy by the Opposition? Will she explain why three quarters of Tory Members are not in the Chamber and are not available to vote? They have gone home.

Mrs. May: The only act of hypocrisy is the hypocrisy of a Labour Government who told people that they would reduce class sizes, but will not do so. People will have the wool pulled over their eyes. They will realise that, and we shall soon see how strongly they feel about this issue.

I should be grateful if the Under-Secretary, when she replies to this debate, would address the issue of social need. I know that the Minister has received written representations from charitable foundations that rely on the assisted places scheme to help children with family difficulties. That is especially relevant where one child has an assisted place and the other will not be able to take one up unless the amendment is accepted.

Mr. Swayne: I was a schoolmaster for some years, and was in teaching when the assisted places scheme was introduced. We often provided an additional assisted place for a younger sibling who was being bullied at the school down the road because the elder sibling was at a posh school. We provided places so that families could be reunited and to remove a child from the curse of bullying.

Mrs. May: If our amendment is not accepted, the legislation will retain or put in place the situation that my hon. Friend describes. A child could not be removed from the curse, as my hon. Friend puts it, and put in the same school as his sibling under the assisted places scheme. The wool is being pulled over the public's eyes.

Mr. Don Foster: The Committee fully understands the hon. Lady's passion about the sibling issue. She presents a powerful argument. Can she explain why it is that, in the 17 years or so of the operation of the assisted places scheme, the previous Administration did not give siblings an automatic opportunity to go to assisted places schools?

Mrs. May: It is obvious that the hon. Gentleman has not been listening to what we have been saying for years about the importance of choice. The cases that have been mentioned were those in which parents chose the assisted places scheme for their children, and children wanted to join their siblings in the schools operating that scheme. We are not discussing imposition. It is typical of the Liberal Democrat party under its new colours to come out with such proposals and policies.

I trust that the Minister will respond to our points about social needs because they have brushed that valid issue to one side. It is important to respond to it. I know that the charitable foundations that have raised this matter with

the Minister have not yet had a response. They have told me that they were having constructive discussions before the election with the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service. They spoke about the need to ensure that the children came first.

Unless the amendments are accepted, the Government's message will be that children do not come first, but that the paramount issue is the Government's interest in imposing the legislation. They are certainly not thinking about the interests of children or about their education.

Mr. Luff: I am in a dilemma about how to approach the amendment, because I hate the legislation with every fibre of my body. It is seriously misguided. It is a simple sop to the left wing of the Labour party, it lacks any intellectual coherence or credibility, it will not save money and it will not achieve any of the Government's hoped-for objectives. However, I sincerely want to improve the legislation where that can be done. For that reason, I shall have to move out of confrontational mode and be a supplicant by asking them to listen carefully to the power of the amendment's logic. They could and should accept it.

I speak from the experience of the general election campaign. In village after village and town after town, I stood on doorsteps in places such as Droitwich Spa, South Littleton and Drakes Broughton and met families in precisely the dilemma that we are debating. Worried mothers—they were, I think, always mothers—told me on the doorstep that their son or daughter already had an assisted place and that their younger son or daughter had ability that would enable them to gain admission to the same school.

This concerns the admissions policy point that the Minister tried to raise. Ability does tend to run in families. Children know that they can go to the same school as their elder sibling now. They will be denied that right unless the amendment is accepted. Parent after parent said to me, "Please can you persuade Labour, if it wins, to take account of our position?" The point is genuine.

I know that the Under-Secretary is a reasonable woman and is listening carefully to the debate. I am sure that she will respond in depth, unlike her colleague the Minister for School Standards, who treated the Committee quite shamefully with his pathetic responses to serious debates. She is not of that mould.

The Government say that they want to govern for all the people. Actually, that was a slogan in the Conservative party's 1970 manifesto. It is a common theme; we all want to govern for all the people—although, apparently, under the Bill, the Government will not be governing for people who have the misfortune to live in areas with a high concentration of assisted places, such as Worcestershire, where the local education authority will have problems coping with the fall-out of the legislation.

The Government will not worry about parents who want to send their children to single-sex schools or schools with sixth forms and who have the option of doing so only through the assisted places scheme. They will not worry about those people—they are not all the people. I hope that the Government give a crumb of comfort to the very small group of people who have second and third children of the ability to go to the schools in question and who will be affected by amendment.

If the Minister does not give such people a crumb of comfort, she will be forgetting the doctrine of J. F. Kennedy, who said that the sum of all the minorities is a majority. The minorities must be cared for. The minority in question is important. The examples cited by my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham are specific hard cases based in reality. They concern the real people of whom my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead spoke so ably—and scathingly—in her most excellent speech.

The amendment provides the Government with an opportunity to prove that they are indeed a Government of compassion, for that is what they need to exercise to accept the amendment. The amendment does not go to the heart of the legislation; it does not destroy the whole thrust of it. We tried doing that in amendments to clause 1, and we lost—and I am very sorry that we lost. The amendment is very narrow and affects a very small group of people. It will not affect the savings one jot or iota. We are talking about the odd few hundred pounds net here or there in individual LEAs. Accepting it will prove that the Government listen to people in real distress and concern.

There are three principal reasons why the Government should accept the amendment. First, there is the simple question of family tradition. It matters in a family that, wherever possible, the children go to the same school; it is a matter of pride. It is not a sexist point.

Mr. David Heath: Even grammar schools?

Mr. Luff: Yes, even grammar schools. The hon. Gentleman does not understand. If he had been listening earlier, he would know that I have already dealt with that point.

It matters, wherever possible, that siblings go to the same school. It will not always be possible. We live in the real world. Schools can be full, children may not have the required ability and individual problems may arise. However, when an elder child has gone to a school, the younger child of the family wants, if at all possible, to go to the same school.

The second good argument for accepting the amendment is the unfairness point with which my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham dealt so ably. I will not draw on new examples, although I could cite them in my constituency. The Minister should listen to the specific examples.

Thirdly, and most important given from what I understand of the Government's perspective, is the serious inconvenience caused to working families, especially single parents, in trying to deal with different schools and fitting things into their crowded lives. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead spoke of different holidays. We should not seek to create imperfections where they do not already exist.

Wherever possible—it will not always be possible, because we do not live in an ideal world—we should help the typically poorer families who cannot afford the taxis, about which there were so many disparaging remarks earlier, to take their children to the same school. The point is that there will not be many of them. This is not a fundamental attack on the heart of the Bill. It is an easy and simple thing for the Government to accept.

Having been a governor of maintained schools, I know of the priority that such schools have given to siblings in their admissions policy wherever possible. That is entirely

[Mr. Luff]

right and honourable. When we set the admissions policies at the two schools at which I was governor, we gave that priority to siblings. It is a practice in the maintained sector, and the Government should find it in their heart to extend it to this limited area of the Bill.

I have many debates with my local education authority—Hereford and Worcester county council—about admissions policy when popular schools are full. I am not impressed by everything that the authority does—sadly it is in the wrong hands—but I am impressed by the sincerity with which it tries to deal with the problem of siblings. Although it often cannot be avoided, it tries to avoid separating them wherever possible. I pay tribute to the authority for that and I hope that the Government will follow that example.

To paraphrase the Prime Minister, it is a question of trust. What worries me is that the children who are not able to follow their siblings to the schools that they could have gone to will blame not the Minister, the Prime Minister, the Government or the Act—if it becomes an Act—but their parents. They will feel that their parents let them down in some way. They will not understand why they cannot go to the same school. I genuinely plead with the Minister, with every fibre of my body, to think most seriously about the amendment and to do something to help those families.

11 pm

Mr. St. Aubyn: I wondered whether I should stand up at all after the earlier comments of the Minister for School Standards. He made it clear, in response to points I was making about the difficulties that the legislation will cause for my constituents, that he was not interested in the impact of the Bill on people in Guildford. He was concerned merely with his master plan for the country. What a slap in the face for my constituents and, above all, what a slap in the face for nearly 10,000 people in my constituency who voted Labour at the election. I cannot help wondering how many of them would have voted Labour if they knew that the Minister responsible for the education of their children did not care one bit about what the legislation would mean for people in my constituency. I hope that, if he has the grace to reappear this evening or before it is too late, the Minister will consider retracting his remarks and giving the apology that he ought to give.

I have sired five siblings, of whom four had the good fortune to be at the same school at the same time. There is no doubt that, when members of a family are at the same school, a bond develops between them, which will be a benefit to them throughout their lives. That is why I think that it is a measure of the mean-spirited minds behind the Bill that they will not even consider at least allowing that something should be paid for siblings by the local authority.

We all know that the extra cost of the scheme on average is £1,000 per child, but, for an individual family, the cost of replacing the entire fees paid to a school is a great deal more than £1,000. It would be entirely consistent with the Government's professed aims to say that, for siblings, a payment equivalent to the local authority's cost per head would carry on being paid. In those circumstances, even if the family were not able to come up with the money, the school might find it from general resources or a local charity or sponsor might be found, or, within the wider family, there might be an uncle, aunt or grandparent who could afford to pay the extra £1,000 a year, but could not afford to pay £4,000 a year, which is the average cost of the typical fees. The fact that Ministers have not considered the Bill's effects, which will means so much to siblings, is a measure of the mean-spiritedness and haste with which the Bill has been drafted.

Another factor to consider is the Bill's double whammy on siblings. I do not think that any hon. Member has yet mentioned that the proportion of fees that parents must pay per child decreases as the number of children attending under the scheme increases. For one child, no parental contribution is required from families earning up to £10,000 a year. If the family income is £18,000 a year, however, according to figures printed, in February, in *The Guardian*—

Mr. Flynn: So the figures must be right.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Yes, they must be right.

The parental contribution from such families for one child was £1,524, whereas the contribution for each of two children was £1,143, or a total of £2,286. The cost will rise under changes to the scheme. If one of those children is forced to leave his or her first preparatory school and is not allowed to continue independent school education, the parents will pay nearly as much—£1,524—to educate only one child. Almost the same exaction will be made from that family's budget, for the benefit of educating only one child and of dividing the family unit. The imposition of that double whammy on families that have two or more children but not much money is a good measure of the Bill's mean-spirited nature.

The Government should now halt further consideration of the Bill and allow matters to rest. They should not force a Division on the amendments to clause 2, but they should return with sensible proposals on how they will mitigate the real problems caused by the Bill for families with children who would like to attend the same school.

Mr. Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): Mr. Lord, you will forgive me—as a fresh-faced, wet-behind-the-ears new boy—if I take up the point that was made earlier in the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) and say that I had had the impression, as I did when I spoke in the Second Reading debate, that this is a debating Chamber. Today, however, all the questions have been asked and all the points and arguments have been made by Conservative Members. It has been rather like trying to play frisbee with the Woodentops, because we have gotten nothing back. We have received no answers to our questions and there has been no consideration of the new points that we have raised.

It was real cheek for the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) to ask why there are not more Conservative Members in the Chamber. Even with my

non-private school education, I can tell that there are rather more Conservative Members here than Labour Members.

Mr. Flynn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Loughton: No, I will not; let me get on. I have been waiting all evening to speak.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): I thought that the hon. Gentleman wanted more debate.

Mr. Loughton: At last, we may have some debate. If a few more of the colleagues of the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) had put down their crème de menthe frappés and pork scratchings in the bar and bothered to come into the Chamber, perhaps we might have had a proper debate, rather than relying all evening on Conservative Members to provide one.

Mr. Flynn: When the hon. Gentleman's experience of this place stretches beyond four weeks, he might realise that the important events are the votes, rather than the debates—regrettable though that may be. The last vote was decided by 300 votes to 39. It is an utter disgrace that newly elected Tory Members play truant on such a vital Bill. It is hypocritical of the hon. Gentleman to say that they are sincere in their views when three quarters of his party are at home in bed.

Mr. Loughton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that friendly advice. It confirms my point that 20 members of his party attend the debate, with the other 280-odd being Lobby fodder, when they put down their creme de menthe frappés and pork scratchings.

Mr. Lansley: Labour Members have not come here to participate in the debate. I, too, am a new Member. I thought that the purpose of our coming here this evening was to debate the Bill, to determine whether it had merit and, if possible, to improve it. That is exactly what we are trying to do.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I remind the Committee that the subject of the amendment is siblings. I would be grateful if the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) would address that.

Mr. Loughton: I am grateful for your advice, Mr. Lord. Perhaps, at this late hour, a certain fascination with crème de menthe frappés and pork scratchings may be forgiven.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): On a point of order, Mr. Lord. How did the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) manage to find crème de menthe frappés and pork scratchings in four weeks? I have been here 14 years and I still cannot find them.

Mr. Loughton: I sought advice from the Minister without Portfolio. I gather that the formal reply will be appearing before long in e-mail from Excalibur.

I want to get on with the speech I am trying to make and to deal with the subject of siblings. Hon. Members should grow up and face the fact that the Bill has nothing to do with class sizes; it has nothing to do with providing better conditions for kids in maintained schools—but it has everything to do with the Government's insidious and spiteful agenda for private schools. It is the thin edge of the wedge.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman must address his remarks specifically to the question of siblings, or he will be out of order.

Mr. Loughton: I am sorry, Mr. Lord.

On the specific subject of siblings, I want to take up a couple of points ably made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). I, too, served for many years on a local education authority appeals panel. As my hon. Friend rightly said, the single largest subject for objections was siblings not being able to attend the same schools—usually because the good schools were full. They had waiting lists, so even with such an important criterion as siblings, the schools could not help. That was why it was so necessary that the extra funds available from other parts of the education budget should be concentrated on the good schools. That is what the Conservative Government tried to do.

The debate has been filled with incongruities. There have been attacks on the private schools offering assisted places—from the Liberal Democrats, on the basis that their results were not very good. The argument was that their results did not match up to those of LEA schools. If that were the case, parents would not be so stupid as to want assisted places for their children in those schools and the scheme would have withered on the vine and been abandoned.

No mention has been made of the fact that one of the fastest growth areas in assisted places is among ethnic minorities, where siblings are an important consideration. Brothers and sisters from ethnic minorities may be attracted to a special education that they could achieve on assisted places but could not achieve in certain inner city schools, where they are not able to fit in and fulfil their potential.

The Government have made very little mention of anything during the debate, but particularly we have heard very little about the children. The debate seems to have been focused on the parents, as if they were social lepers trying a scam on the education system to get extra places for their selfish—

11.15 pm

Mr. Clappison: Given the structure of the Bill, there may be circumstances in which one sibling in a primary school that is linked to a secondary school attended by another sibling will be forced to leave their school while the other child proceeds in the secondary school through to 18. Siblings may be forced to move to separate schools in the middle of their school career.

Mr. Loughton: That is an exceedingly valid point. My wife and her sister attended the same fee-paying school. Their parents worked overseas for the European Space Agency for many years. It was particularly important for those two young girls to be together in the same school. If girls in that situation were relying on the assisted places scheme now, it would be a traumatic experience at an impressionable time in their education.

[Mr. Loughton]

Have the Government shown any concern about that? Have we heard a mention of the implications for brothers and sisters?

Mr. Swayne: When I went to school as Swayne minimus, I received a great deal of attention and assistance from my elder brothers. That would not have been possible if we had been on assisted places in the environment that will be achieved by the Bill. I would have been unable to attend that school and would have had to go to another. The environment for a new pupil in any school is terrifying and unfamiliar. It is a great assistance to have the help and succour of one's elder brothers—I say elder brothers for it was a single-sex institution. The fact is, however—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. Hon. Members must resume their seats when I am on my feet. The hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear me say earlier that interventions should be brief and to the point.

Mr. Loughton: I am grateful for the important point that my hon. Friend was attempting to make. I hope that he will elaborate on it in his speech rather than pinching part of mine.

Perhaps we could put the debate and this flimsy, pathetic little Bill in the context of the Government's broader plans for education, which will affect many people. Not only are they endeavouring to deny pupils on assisted places and their siblings that choice; soon, an attack on grammar schools will also be on the agenda.

We know what the Government have said about grammar schools. They are not concerned about the few of the grammar schools; they are much more concerned with the many. The implication of that is that grammar schools must surely be under threat as well. Children who are currently on the assisted places scheme, and their siblings, will be forced off the scheme because their parents cannot afford to pay the full private school fees. As my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) said, 40 per cent. of children on the scheme receive the maximum help because their parents' income is well under the £10,000 ceiling.

The Government have made no mention of the sliding scale for the payment of fees. My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford also made an important point about the discounts available for siblings, but such matters have not come up in the Ministers' flimsy arguments.

Not only will pupils currently on the assisted places scheme, and their siblings, be denied access to grammar schools as a possible alternative, but the Labour Government are going to attack the principle of grant-maintained schools. A further choice will therefore be denied to parents as Labour local education authorities install their placemen to undermine the principle of grant-maintained schools. The Government's principle is that nanny knows best—if it is not provided by the local education authority, it is not worth the paper it is written on.

What about the private schools that I began by mentioning? The Bill is the start of the slippery slope, because the Government will attack private education with VAT and then attack the charitable status of private schools. That is Labour's real agenda. I remind hon. Members to put that in the context of the range of choice currently available to children in this country.

Another issue, which I shall probably be pulled up short for mentioning, is that of nursery vouchers. The Government's approach to them is the most crass example of a complete stifling of choice for children at an early age.

The Government have used flawed figures and costs for sixth forms, among other things. They have not mentioned the fact that, in most cases, the assisted places scheme pays the boarding fees, not the full fees for pupils and their siblings.

A school in my constituency had hoped to be one of the next wave of go-ahead, exciting schools participating in the assisted places scheme. Lancing college, the major public school, works very closely with and gives a lot back to the community, and draws most of its pupils from that community. That school will now be denied the opportunity to broaden its appeal even further to the community that it serves and with which it has a very good relationship.

Is it not the case that the Bill—and this farce of a debate—is the result of an ill-thought-out and hasty vendetta by Labour against what it has misjudged as an issue of privilege? For the past 18 years, the Labour party has been straining at the leash to wage its misguided vendetta against private schools. The Bill amounts to the return of the nanny state and the stifling of choice for parents and their children. We broadened and extended that choice, but it is about to be stamped on with indecent haste.

Mr. Clappison: As the Committee will have gathered, the amendment is of particular interest to many of my constituents. They and I realised that, when Labour set out in its manifesto its proposals to phase out the assisted places scheme, the problem of the sibling connection would arise. Of course, my constituents' fears were confirmed when the issue was included in the Queen's Speech and the Bill was then introduced as a priority.

I mentioned the sibling connection during the education debate on the Queen's Speech because I knew that many of my constituents would want me to do so. When I listened to that debate, I took heart from the words of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. I thought that I was being realistic in accepting that the Labour party had a mandate for its policy—

Mr. Radice: The hon. Member is the first Conservative to have said that.

Mr. Clappison: As the hon. Gentleman says, I am the first to have said that, and we have many questions to ask about the policy. I do not know whether he was present when I was making my earlier points in connection with the savings to be made from the abolition of the assisted places scheme and whether or not they would be sufficient to pay for the Labour party's aspirations. That was the basis on which the pledge was made. I know that the hon. Gentleman, who is an astute and experienced Member, will have been less than convinced by the explanation about the finances given by the Minister.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Surely my hon. Friend—like so many of my constituents—when reading a Bill that calls itself

the Education (Schools) Bill and knowing that the Labour party's pledge is to reduce class sizes, would expect us at this late hour to be talking about increasing resources in order to do that. We would be expected to be talking about that subject as well as about siblings. Is there a single word in the Bill related to reducing class sizes? It is all about ensuring that siblings stay in the class.

Mr. Clappison: Another important point has arisen: whether or not the savings will be transferred to schools through local authorities.

I want to be nice to the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment because I want her to listen carefully to this debate. To her credit, she has listened patiently, and I hope that I shall be able to change her mind. I am going to remind her of the words of the Secretary of State when he was asked about the sibling connection and existing places in the debate on the Queen's Speech. The right hon. Gentleman said:

"The hallmark of this Government will be to put children before dogma. It will be to ensure that the interests of our children come first on every occasion."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1997; Vol. 294, c.183.]

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hear some support from Labour Members and I hope that the Minister will listen to it as well. I hope that the Government will be able to consider the interests of individual children and see whether it is necessary to do away with the sibling connection for pupils and whether the matter can be dealt with in a compassionate and flexible way that reflects the concerns that we have heard in so many contributions this evening.

I know the argument that is going through the Minister's mind. She has half canvassed the argument already, and it has also been echoed from the Liberal Benches. The argument advanced was that because there is a selection process for schools with assisted places, that invalidates the proposition that there has to be a sibling connection—it cannot be guaranteed that a sibling connection can be used if the sibling does not meet the necessary academic standard. I accept that that is a fair point and that it will take the Minister some way, but it will not take her far enough.

It may be the case—I believe that it is—that many siblings are sufficiently bright to have a highly academic education. Therefore, on the grounds that there is at least some prospect of a sibling connection being used, I hope that the Minister will think carefully about how she can preserve that connection.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who has long experience in, and is an authority on, education, posed what I call the Liberal question. I do not know his views on selection, but I suspect that, being a Liberal, he will probably oppose it. He will know from his experience that, if a child who is not academic goes to an academic school, it does him no favours because he has to struggle all the way through his school career, is unable to keep up with the other pupils and has a difficult time. The situation would be different if the child were bright.

I shall put it in practical terms—this is an issue that we need to consider in that way. The hon. Gentleman should think of the issue in terms of Bradford grammar school, which has a number of assisted places and of which people in his part of the world are every bit as proud as people in my part of the world are proud of Haberdashers' Aske's. They are both highly academic schools, of great national prestige and kudos that achieve a great deal for their pupils.

The hon. Gentleman will know that it would not do a non-academic child any good to go to a school such as Bradford grammar; but if two brothers, say, are equally bright, that is an altogether different matter. It would be cruel not to allow the two children to go to the same school. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough will, I am sure, take the point, based on experience of his part of the world.

Thus the Minister's argument that because of selection there is no guarantee that siblings can attend the same school does not go far enough to answer our arguments. We believe that there are many siblings in bright families who can go to the same schools.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) mentioned Haberdashers' Aske's, and quoted letters from parents whose children attend the school. I conducted a little research and discovered that there are 230 children on assisted places at the school, out of a total of 1,300 pupils. I understand that that includes 14 pairs of brothers, as well as one family with three brothers at the school. There are also other children on assisted places at other schools in my constituency.

11.30 pm

It would be well worth conducting some research to find out how many children may be affected by the loss of assisted places for siblings. I agree with all my hon. Friends' arguments as to why it is desirable for siblings to attend the same school whenever that is possible. There are social reasons, reasons of family convenience, reasons of mutual support. Children may be affected by these decisions for the rest of their lives.

I invite the Minister to consider the matter in personal terms. My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham did the Committee a service by doing just that: she put it in terms of the Benjamin Brady question. These days we seem to attach names to many of these questions: the Gary McAllister question, the Paul Gascoigne question and so on.

Again I urge the Minister to consider the personal consequences for children who may be affected. The thought that a child did not have the same opportunity as its brother or sister even though it was equally bright might affect that child for the rest of its life. This is not to denigrate the other schools that such children might be forced to attend. They may be performing well on any objective test, but, as the Minister knows, the schools that we are talking about are highly academic. Many of them are the old direct grant schools—Bradford grammar, Manchester grammar, Leeds grammar; others are old foundations such as Haberdashers' Aske's in my constituency. For a long time those schools have been centres of national excellence and renown, highly competitive and achieving very good results.

I know that some families with one son at Haberdashers' Aske's will want to place younger brothers there too. Those younger brothers may confidently be expected to pass the entrance exam. These people are waiting to hear what the Government have to say this evening. The same applies to the parents of girls in the sister school and in other schools in my constituency.

[Mr. Clappison]

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), I invite the Minister to be flexible and to act compassionately. If she is prepared to consider the amendment or to accept it, it will not bring the Bill crashing down; it will not ruin the Government's policy. Relatively few people are involved, but they are extremely interested in the amendment.

I invite the Minister to think carefully and to be flexible. We do not know how many children will be affected. The Government might usefully carry out some research to ascertain whether there is a way of accommodating those families.

I understand that the Government want the Bill to be passed as soon as possible so that they can start phasing out assisted places, saving the money from the scheme and putting it towards reducing class sizes, but we have heard tonight that they are unsure about the financial picture. There may be a financial way of doing what the Government want to do and accommodating those families, so I ask the Minister to give the matter careful thought.

It would only take a little while for the Minister to think about the matter. I hope that the Government will not decide to steamroller the Bill through without considering amendments or listening to debates. I hope that in some cases they will be prepared to consider amendments, and I hope that the Minister can do so this time.

The Minister will remember many times, when she was in opposition, when we debated education Bills and other legislation, when she argued strongly with Ministers on behalf of constituents, and Ministers were prepared to listen to debates and take away—

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Name one.

Mr. Clappison: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman speaks to the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), the Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment; we listened to the amendments that he tabled to the Housing Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for—

Mr. Clifton–Brown: Cotswold.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) was there on that occasion. We said that we would think about the amendments. We accepted some amendments outright and were criticised—to be fair, not by the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich but by some of his colleagues—for introducing legislation that was ill thought out and in a muddle and which needed to be amended.

If the Minister is prepared to take the matter away, think about it and speak to the Secretary of State about it, I promise that we shall not make any such suggestions or criticisms. I will be the first to praise the Government for listening to the arguments and for being prepared to be flexible and to accommodate individual cases.

I invite the Minister to consider the framework that already exists in the Bill, especially the transitional arrangements. Clause 3 describes the transitional arrangements. If the Government are unhappy with the amendment, they may be able to find a way of incorporating the sibling connection in the transitional arrangements in that clause.

I ask the hon. Lady to be flexible, because her conduct will say a great deal about the Government's approach. The Secretary of State used fine words about putting children before dogma and the interests of the child being paramount, but we need more than words: we want a practical, positive response. We want deeds to match those words. This would be a good place to start because of the individual cases involved—the possible suffering if no sibling connection is introduced. I urge the hon. Lady to take the matter away and find out whether there is a way to do justice to it.

Many Labour Back Benchers who have been silent tonight—I make no criticism of them—have constituents whose children have assisted places in such schools, with sibling connections, and those families will be very interested in this matter, like the constituents of Opposition Members, who have spoken with great force. I invite the hon. Lady to live up to the fine words and to take the matter away and think about it.

The Government will set a bad precedent if they are not prepared to consider such cases. A message will be sent to the country that the Government will steamroller legislation through Parliament in a rush, without considering how it may be improved, conducting research or devising ways to accommodate individual cases. The Minister would do the Government and herself a great favour if she were prepared to show flexibility and come some way to meet the concerns that we have expressed about the sibling connection.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Many arguments of principle have been advanced by my hon. Friends in the absence of any arguments from Labour Members. The few Labour Members who have agreed to attend this important debate have decided not to reinforce the general arguments advanced by the Government.

I wish to help the Minister by producing some specific examples that relate to siblings. If taken into account, they would greatly improve the Bill. My examples are based on experience in my constituency, and a school that is especially concerned with the effects of the Bill. I think that they will interest Labour Members because they concern an all girls school. We have heard this week that the Government have new proposals to improve, allegedly, the lot of women. I hope, therefore, that the Minister and her colleagues will be particularly concerned with girls' education and how to improve it.

The Ashford school for girls is an excellent independent school. For many years, it has dealt with the education of girls from many parts of Kent. It is extremely pleased to participate in the assisted places scheme precisely because it helps to preserve a social mix and to bring the benefits of the excellent education that it provides to those who could not otherwise afford it.

The school is slightly unusual in that it takes girls from the age of three right through to the age of 18. It will be especially badly hit by the Bill. The sisters of girls who are already there will be particularly badly hit by clause 2 if the amendment is not accepted.

We are talking not about siblings who might go to the school, but about girls who are already at the school who will not be allowed to continue beyond the age of 11.

There is no dividing line now at that age because educations runs from age three to 18. The consequences for the school will be particularly disastrous because girls' sisters who already attend the school will not be allowed to continue under the APS after the age of 11. At an especially vulnerable age—an important age for the continuation of their education—they will be forcibly moved to other schools.

I invite the Minister and Labour Back Benchers to consider the effect that such a move would have on the girls in question. It would be psychologically scarring, it would damage their education, and many hundreds of girls would be affected over the years in a way that is not intended by those who support the Bill.

I accept the Government's good faith in introducing what I consider to be a misguided Bill, but I ask them to consider the amendment on its merits. Labour Members should not regard it—many of them seem to do so, I regret—as a piece of dogma that needs to be driven through the House of Commons with no arguments put behind it from the point of view of preserving ideological purity. Instead, they should consider the effects of the Bill on the education of individual girls.

The Bill will have an effect on siblings and it will introduce a degree of retrospection, which is bad in any legislation. In the full knowledge that, if a Labour Government were elected, they would introduce a Bill such as this, Ashford school obtained the Department's agreement that it could take girls on assisted places with the expectation that, having entered the school at the age of three, four, five, six or more, they would be able to go right through to the age of 18.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I wonder whether the Government and my hon. Friend have considered the possible effect on that school, and others, of their suddenly finding themselves non-viable and having to close as a result of the loss of siblings or the main assisted places. What would be the effect if all the children currently paying fees and not being assisted by the scheme were to go into local schools? Would that reduce class sizes, as the Government are pledged to do, or increase them?

11.45 pm

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I am happy to reassure him and the House that such an eventuality would not befall Ashford school, because it is such an excellent school that many hundreds of girls would still apply to attend.

My hon. Friend makes a good point, for two reasons. First, if pupils are withdrawn from schools, that may have a serious effect on the schools and cause them to close, thus damaging education in certain areas. Secondly, that would not only damage the independent schools in a particular area; it would have a serious and damaging effect on the state schools in the area. Pupils would be displaced and schools would have to take on a rush of new pupils. I beg the Minister to consider the fact that that would involve an increase in class sizes in the state schools. If the abolition of the APS caused the closure of independent schools, the effect would be to displace pupils into the state system—exactly the opposite effect to that which is intended. I urge the Government to consider that important point.

Mr. Lansley: I am interested in my hon. Friend's observations from his constituency. Given that, in the circumstances that he described, younger siblings would be displaced into state schools, would parents be able to choose another single-sex school for their children? Is such a school readily available in my hon. Friend's constituency? Once the pupils were displaced out of the independent sector, would places be available, or would such schools be over-subscribed?

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes two excellent points. In my constituency there would not be schools of a similar type. It is extremely important that as much choice as possible is available to parents, particularly to parents of girls. It has often been observed that all boys should go to mixed schools, but all girls should go to single-sex schools if their education is to be maximised. I agree with that saying.

The choice available to parents and pupils would be lessened, as my hon. Friend suggested. There would be a serious effect on class sizes and no doubt some schools would become overcrowded. That would negate what the Government intend as the main purpose of this spiteful little measure. The supposed benefit is that class sizes will be reduced, but one possible effect would be an increase in class sizes. That cannot be the Government's intention.

It is not only convenient for parents to send their children to the same school; it is environmentally beneficial, because it reduces the number of car journeys at peak hours at each end of the school day. Forcing siblings to go to different schools will increase the amount of peak-hour traffic on our roads. *[Interruption.]* On a day when the Deputy Prime Minister has allegedly been making great strides towards reducing traffic, it is ironic that the Government are proposing a measure that will increase congestion. *[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber.

Mr. Green: Society as a whole benefits from siblings going to the same school, because the number of car journeys at peak hours is reduced. If Labour Members do not take that point seriously, they should be careful to do so only from a sedentary position: otherwise, they will appear on Excalibur as being off message, and we know what effect that would have.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend's point has an environmental complexion. Labour Members may care to note that major campaigns have been launched by the Department of the Environment from time to time to persuade parents not to use their cars for short journeys to take their children to school, because that is when car emissions are most environmentally damaging. That is an important point.

Mr. Green: I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that Ministers who are enjoying their new cars are using them in the most environmentally friendly fashion.

Mr. Lansley: Many parents whose children go to schools such as my hon. Friend has described are working mothers or lone parents who have to accept responsibility for delivering children to, and collecting children from, school. Labour Members may not want to hear this argument. In the past, their contention has been that they

[Mr. Lansley]

wish to help lone parents into work, but this kind of measure could place additional burdens on parents who have to deliver children to different schools in different areas and prevent them from undertaking the work of their choice.

Mr. Green: That is an important point. We have heard much oratory from Labour Members about single mothers and how important it is that they should be allowed to work. One of the best ways to help single mothers, or working mothers of any kind, to get to work is to ensure that the journeys at each end of the school day are as simple and easy as possible, and the best way to do that is to ensure that in as many cases as possible all siblings go to the same school.

The Bill makes it more difficult for siblings to attend the same school, it will increase the journey time to schools and it will make it difficult for mothers to seek work, so making it more difficult to get them back into the labour force—an aim which Labour Members allegedly support.

Mr. Loughton: There is yet another important point in which the Government have no interest. Does my hon. Friend appreciate that up to a half of all journeys in Britain are shorter than five miles? On the A27 through my constituency, the largest cause of traffic congestion is parents taking their children to school. That problem will be compounded further if children have to be taken to different schools as siblings are split up by the sheer vindictiveness of this measure.

Mr. Green: I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent point.

When I was a state school governor, one of the basic tenets to which the school held in an attempt to improve the education of its children, like almost every school in Britain, was that priority should be given to siblings. Education is improved for individual children if sisters and brothers are allowed to go to the same school.

If that is good enough in the state sector, it should be good enough in the independent sector. The Government should be concerned with the education in all schools in Britain. They claim to be the Government for all, not just the few, so they should not impose discriminatory measures such as the Bill on children from relatively disadvantaged homes who benefit from the scheme. The Government will discriminate against those children by passing the Bill.

I appeal to the Minister and the Government to show some flexibility. Several of my right hon. and hon. Friends have made the point that the amendments would not wreck the central tenets of the Bill; they would simply improve it at the margin. That margin is extremely important, and I hope that the Government will take the argument seriously.

Conservative Members have tried to improve the Bill. Labour Members have sat here—not silently, but all their remarks have been made from a sedentary position—and contributed nothing to the debate. Many of them have returned to the Chamber from wherever they have been, but they have not advanced one argument all evening about how the central thrust of the Bill will improve education or, in particular, why the amendments we have been discussing for the past few hours are no good. Labour Members have not advanced one argument in favour of the Bill.

We have tried to improve the Bill for the Government by proposing the amendments. I appeal to the Minister to show some flexibility, to take the Bill away, to think again, to accept some of our amendments and to refuse to put through a measure that will damage the education of many thousands of children in my constituency and across the country.

Ms Estelle Morris: This is the first opportunity that I have had to speak in the Chamber, Mr. Martin, since your appointment as Deputy Speaker. I wish to congratulate you and to note that we always seem to start a parliamentary Session by serving together on an education Bill in our respective roles. Long may that continue.

I listened to the comments made by the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) when she moved the amendment. We heard crocodile tears from the hon. Lady, and I shall explain why later in my speech. If the issue of siblings being allowed to continue to take up assisted places is such a large issue—the most burning issue that we have discussed tonight—and if it provokes such tales of woe, as the hon. Lady suggested, I wonder why she and her colleagues marched into the Lobby some two hours ago to vote against the continuation of the debate. I am grateful that my hon. Friends allowed the debate to continue, so that we have had the opportunity to give a fair hearing to the issue.

Mrs. Gillan: I shall tell the Minister why we marched into the Lobby two hours ago against the 10 o'clock motion. We did so because it has been obvious from the behaviour of Labour Members during the debate that they are not interested in the details of the Bill. They are not interested in considering individual problems and they have arrogantly used their majority to railroad the Bill through the House. I wanted a more temperate debate on the Bill on another occasion, but the Government wanted to pass the Bill in a couple of hours. We went through the Lobby because we believe that the assisted places scheme is worth saving—the Government do not.

Ms Morris: As I said, we have seen many crocodile tears from Opposition Members. No one in the Committee—not Labour Members nor Conservative Members—has a monopoly of concern for children's welfare and well-being. The hon. Lady claimed that for herself and her hon. Friends, but that can never be the case. The Tories were the party that left the education system with £3 billion of school repairs outstanding, with half our 11-year-olds failing to reach the necessary levels of literacy and numeracy and with many of our four, five and six-year-olds in classes of more than 30. How dare the hon. Lady claim that she is concerned about children's education and welfare—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. We cannot have such behaviour in the Committee.

Mr. Luff: The Minister is out of order.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman should know better.

Ms Morris: I am concerned about Benjamin Brayley and the Mileses and Matthews—the individual cases that

the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham mentioned and to which I listened carefully. Is that the worst thing that is likely to happen to those children? The hon. Lady thinks that it is such a terrible thing that they will be educated in the maintained sector. I have more faith in the state education system than Opposition Members.

12 midnight

Mr. Clappison: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Morris: No, I am going to make some progress.

The hon. Lady talked about a young man called Philip who was on an assisted places scheme and was about to get straight As in his GCSE examinations this year. I wish him well; I hope that he gets those straight As. But he will join thousands of others Philips and Philippas who will also get straight As and will take their place with him, doing A-levels and studying at the finest universities in the country. They will have received their education and their life chances from the state education system that the hon. Lady seems to consider such a terrible thing.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Ms Morris: I might give way later, if I am allowed to make some progress now.

Notwithstanding all the individual cases of which we have heard, all the names that have been bandied about by Opposition Members and all the letters from parents that have been read out, not once has any Opposition Member given the name of a child who is currently being educated in a class of more than 40 and is five years old. We have not been read a single letter from a parent who just wants the sort of teacher-pupil ratio that is enjoyed by many in the independent sector.

Mrs. Gillan *rose—*

Ms Morris: I wish that the hon. Lady—who now wants to intervene—would show as much concern for the 7,000 children in the area that is covered by her constituency who are currently in classes of more than 30 and are five, six and seven years old.

Before I give way to the hon. Lady, may I give the Committee one more statistic? In the local authority area covered by the hon. Lady's constituency, 35.8 per cent. of children are in classes of more than 30 in their infant years. Moreover, in the hon. Lady's constituency there is not one assisted place—but she can come to the Committee and make a speech with crocodile tears, presumably on behalf of her constituency, which has not one assisted place but in which more than a third of children are in classes of more than 30 at the ages of five, six and seven.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way— *[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I appeal to hon. Members to be quiet when another hon. Member is addressing the Committee.

Mrs. Gillan: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way.

First, my constituency has a first-class education committee. It does not matter what class sizes are in my constituency; the results that are being achieved for children are first-class. I should like the hon. Lady to repeat what she has said to Mrs. Brayley, Mrs. Nourse and Mrs. James, because she has made it clear tonight that she does not care what happens to those children. It is not true that several letters were read out; the hon. Lady was not even listening. One letter was read out, from Mrs. Nourse. I believe that the hon. Lady has shown that she does not care what children and parents think about the effect of the abolition of the scheme. It is disgusting.

Ms Morris *rose—*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I remind both the Minister and the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) that the subject of the debate is an amendment about siblings. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members must let me tell the Minister. Let me say to the Minister that hon. Members must discuss the amendment, which is about siblings.

Ms Morris: As you will appreciate, Mr. Martin, the debate has been very wide-ranging, and I did not want to be accused of not answering the questions that were raised.

I agree with some of the points raised by the hon. Member for Mid–Worcestershire (Mr. Luff). Like him, I congratulate the local authorities and many schools that put siblings fairly high on their list when they allocate places. However, the system of selection on which the assisted places scheme is built does not give siblings a high priority when it is decided who should receive places where demand exceeds supply.

The Conservative party said in its manifesto—the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) said that we would make this point, and I am making it—that it favoured selection and giving schools the right to select on aptitude or academic ability. It is that system and those criteria more than any other that have split brother from sister, brother from brother and sister from sister. Conservative Members cannot claim that that is the best way to allocate places at secondary school, and then claim that siblings should be given precedence.

Mr. Nicholls *rose—*

Mr. Clappison *rose—*

Ms Morris: I shall not give way at the moment.

The Conservative party's claims led me to make the remark about crocodile tears. The assisted places scheme was introduced not by this Government, but by the previous Government. Did they give priority to siblings? Does the scheme require schools to give siblings precedence over academic ability? No, it does not.

Mr. Nicholls *rose—*

Ms Morris: The hon. Gentleman has had a fair share of the Committee's time. I want to take my fair share of the time, to answer the queries that have been raised.

Mr. Nicholls *rose—*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Lady is not giving way.

Ms Morris: You read my mind correctly, Mr. Martin.

[Ms Morris]

The shadow Minister is a great devotee of the assisted places scheme. What efforts did she make to ensure that, when places on the scheme were allocated, siblings were given precedence over children of higher academic ability? Can she tell the Committee what actions she took to ensure that siblings were at the top of the list of criteria in the allocation of places?

Mrs. Gillan: When I was responsible for the assisted places scheme, I ensured that the scheme expanded. The basis of tonight's argument is that by the removal of the scheme, the hon. Lady is denying siblings the opportunity to go to the assisted places schools that their older brothers and sisters attend. When I was the Minister responsible, they had that opportunity. She is removing that opportunity from those children immediately, and she could not care less.

Ms Morris: As I thought, the hon. Lady took no action to ensure that siblings were put at the top of the list. That is what I mean by crocodile tears.

I agree with the hon. Member for Mid–Worcestershire that siblings should be given a high priority. I believe in a system that allows siblings to be put at the top of the list. Conservative Members advocate a system of selection and develop an assisted places scheme that does nothing to favour siblings at the expense of academic attainment, and then they want us to change the criteria.

Mr. Luff *rose—*

Ms Morris: If Conservative Members cared so much about siblings having the opportunity to join their brothers or sisters at assisted places schools, when they were in power they should have ensured that that was on the list of criteria.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Morris: No, I have almost finished. I want to wind up the debate.

No argument has been put either by the shadow Minister or by Conservative Members—

Mr. Bruce: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. As Ministers are new to their jobs, could you guide the Committee? There is no limitation on the time that the Minister has to respond to the debate. Therefore, in giving way, she is not reducing the time available to her to respond to what is being said.

The First Deputy Chairman: It is entirely up to the hon. Lady as to whether to give way.

Mr. Luff: On a point of order, Mr. Martin.

The First Deputy Chairman: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr. Luff: I seek your guidance. The hon. Lady is discussing my contribution to the debate, but she will not give way to me.

The First Deputy Chairman: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Ms Morris: As I was saying before I was interrupted by points of order, no case has been made for extending the assisted places scheme. We have made it clear both in our manifesto commitment and in speeches that we have no intention of extending the scheme beyond the intake at the start of the next academic year. The amendments would allow an extension of the scheme and that was not one of the pledges on which we fought the election. We have every intention of fulfilling those pledges. Children who are currently in the scheme and those who are taking up places in September at the start of the next academic year will not have their education disrupted.

The money saved will be used to ensure that the opportunities that under a Tory Government were offered only to the few will be offered to the many, and they include the thousands of infants in the constituency of the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham who are currently in classes of more than 30. I have set out our priorities and we have covered the issue of the many and the few. Our determination to raise standards for all would not be furthered by giving resources to the few. We do not want to extend the assisted places scheme and I urge the Committee to reject the amendment.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East) *rose in her place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 246, Noes 32.

Division No. 19] **[12.10 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Stephen
Cabom, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna

Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Olner, Bill
Opik, Lembit
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Amess, David
Bercow, John
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Cash, William
Clappison, James
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Eric
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Loughton, Tim
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
St Aubyn, Nick
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Swayne, Desmond
Walter, Robert
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. David Lidington.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Mrs. Gillan: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. Once again the Government have sought to use a closure motion to stifle the debate of Conservative Members. Can you tell me whether that is right, when they have turned out in such large numbers after showing no—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Lady is clearly making a speech, not a point of order. I shall put the Question.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 29, Noes 245.

Division No. 20] **[12.23 am**

AYES

Amess, David
Bercow, John
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Cash, William
Clappison, James
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Eric
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Loughton, Tim
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Nicholls, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
St Aubyn, Nick
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Swayne, Desmond
Walter, Robert
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lidington and
Mr. Peter Luff.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Stephen
Caborn, Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Ms Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Meale, Alan
Milburn, Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Olner, Bill
Opik, Lembit
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): On a point of order, Mr. Martin. There is on today's Order Paper a Government motion regarding Monday's debate on the European Union. The take-note motion contains a reference to the stability pact—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. The motion is not on today's Order Paper.

Mr. Forth: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 2, line 1, leave out subsection (2).

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 27, in page 2, line 1, after '(2)', insert 'Subject to subsection (2A),'.

No. 3, in page 2, line 5, after 'or,' insert—

'(b) in the case of a pupil with an assisted place at a school providing education for children up to the age of 13 but not beyond, at the end of the school year in which he attains the age of 13, or '.

No. 34, in page 2, line 5, after 'or', insert—

(a) at the end of the school year in which he completes his education within the school where he was provided with an assisted place; or'.

No. 28, in page 2, line 10, at end insert—

'(2A) Unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that the pupil in question will receive secondary education which is comparable to the primary education which he has received in regard to—

(a) its religious content;

(b) the curriculum provided;

(c) opportunities for sport;

(d) size of classes; and

(e) single-sex provision,

he shall determine that that pupil shall continue to hold that place during the period which he receives secondary education.'.

No. 25, in clause 5, page 5, leave out lines 7 to 17.

Mr. Forth: We come to a new aspect of the Bill. I can best sum it up in the words "trust" and "education". I say "trust" because, as the Committee is aware, that word was a key element in the election campaign and was much used by none other than the Prime Minister himself. He asked the electorate to trust him, his party and, presumably therefore, the Government. However, the question that we must ask is what trust parents who have committed their children to an education under the assisted places scheme can have in the Government.

In developing the argument, I want first to read a brief extract from a letter from the chairman of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools, no less, to the Secretary of State, no less. It states:

"I am writing to you as Chairman of the IAPS (Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools) to enquire whether there may have been an oversight in the plans for the phasing out of the Assisted Places Scheme. You have always made it quite clear that the Assisted Places would be removed and there has never been room for doubt about your intentions when elected. There was, however, room for doubt over the precise timings of the phasing out and, in particular, the arrangements as they applied to stand-alone preparatory schools. As you will know most preparatory schools take children up to the age of 13 and after that point most of our pupils transfer to secondary schools but some go to the maintained sector."

Here is the key point. The letter continues:

"When the Labour Party's plans for Assisted Places were announced I wrote to Mr. Peter Kilfoyle in order to clarify the situation regarding the length of tenure of an Assisted Place for children in our schools. He wrote to me on 18th March with a letter that did not make clear the precise details that I was querying. I then heard again from him on 1st April and this letter clarified the situation completely—or so I thought. He states 'If a child has a place at a school which runs to 13 then that place will be honoured through to 13'."

12.45 am

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): As one of my right hon. Friend's predecessors who was in charge of the IAPS for two years, may I ask him whether the letter is not so important that a full text of it should be placed not only in the Library of the House, but before every member of the Committee before we proceed with further debate on the subject?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes a helpful and constructive suggestion. I wonder whether you, Mr. Martin, agree with my hon. Friend's point that the letter—and others that I shall submit to the Committee and to my hon. Friend—

Mr. Fallon: Mr. Martin, does my right hon. Friend agree that we cannot—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Is this a point of order?

Mr. Fallon: No. I am simply addressing my remarks, through you Mr. Martin, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

We cannot keep debating letters that have not been laid before the Committee. We have now referred twice to a letter which, I understand, is of key importance to the Committee—a letter written by a then Opposition spokesman that refers directly to the contractual relationships involved in the scheme. Surely it is right that, if the Committee is to proceed—

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is far too long. I call Mr. Forth.

Mr. Forth: I have much sympathy with what my hon. Friend is saying, and I think that he is trying to be helpful to the Committee. I shall, with your permission, Mr. Martin, read from this letter and one or two others, including a poignant letter from one of my constituents that I received only today. As my hon. Friend has perceptively pointed out, the letter is important. The letter that I quoted, although it was from the chairman of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools to the Secretary of State, makes a point which was mentioned on Second Reading and which is highly pertinent to our current proceedings.

The letter in question was from no less a figure than the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), who, when he wrote the letter, was a senior member of the then shadow education team, and is now a member of Her Majesty's Government. He is not, however, a member of the Government education team. I suspect that one reason why he is not—I regret this, because he is a man for whom I have the most enormous respect and admiration—is that the undertaking he gave as an official Opposition spokesman on this important matter has now been completely reneged on by the Government.

Mr. Jack: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. Is it in order to adjourn the Committee at this stage, so that the important papers to which my right hon. Friend is referring can be made available to members of the Committee? We can then read them for ourselves and judge their importance.

The First Deputy Chairman: Absolutely not.

Mr. Forth: The point at issue is a commitment to young children undergoing their education, and to the continuity of that education.

[Mr. Forth]

The IAPS had perfectly good reason to think, on receiving a letter from the Labour education team in April of this year, that the commitment it contained would be honoured. That letter said:

"If a child has a place at a school which runs to age 13, then that place will be honoured through to 13".

It was perfectly reasonable to suppose that that pledge would be honoured were the Labour party to win the election.

I regret to say that it seems that the pledge will not be honoured—

Mr. Clappison: Does my right hon. Friend agree that any parent receiving such an assurance would feel that it was such a cast-iron guarantee that it would be reasonable to act in reliance on it, and to place a child in a school or allow a child to remain at a school?

Mr. Forth: Yes, indeed. The very next sentence of the letter from the chairman of the IAPS reads:

"On that basis we, in common with a large number of preparatory schools, have offered places to seven and 11-year-olds"—

[Interruption.]

Mr. Jack: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. I apologise for troubling you with another point of order, but I am finding it increasingly difficult, owing to agitated conversations on the Treasury Bench and elsewhere in the Chamber, to follow what my right hon. Friend is saying.

The First Deputy Chairman: I appeal to hon. Members for calm and quiet. A right hon. Member is trying to address the Committee.

Mr. Forth: I apologise to the Committee and to you, Mr. Martin, if the quality of my oratory is not as yet, at this early stage of my remarks, sufficient to capture the attention of all hon. Members who are present. I am laying the ground for my argument by producing some relevant material which, of necessity, I have to read out. I might try to liven it up a bit, if the Committee would prefer that. I hope, however, that Members are listening attentively.

Mr. Lansley: Parents' reasonable expectations of what was to happen to their children, in respect of clauses 1 and 2, are clearly now not going to be fulfilled. What does my right hon. Friend believe the Government propose to do about that?

Mr. Forth: Tempted although I am to do so, it is not for me to answer on behalf of the Government. I am arguing that the Government are seriously damaging the education of several young children because an official Opposition spokesman led parents and schools to believe that one set of circumstances would apply if Labour won the general election and now, regrettably, a completely different set of circumstances apply.

Mr. Nicholls *rose—*

Mr. Swayne *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne).

Mr. Swayne: May I draw attention to the serious nature of the change? By the nature of the fact that they are in receipt of assisted places, the families involved are of very limited income. They are making proportionately very large financial commitments for their children's education, which involve planning over several years and, all of a sudden, the rug from under which they made those assumptions has been pulled away.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend tempts me to advance to a new clause that we have not yet discussed, which covers that rather well. I will resist that temptation, if my hon. Friend will forgive me, because I want to concentrate—

Mr. Nicholls: Will my right hon. Friend yield to another temptation first? Is he certain that he is getting this right? As I understand it, he is saying that an assurance was given by an Opposition spokesman that is unfair, not only to the parents and child concerned but to schools. Presumably, it follows from what he said that some schools must have admitted children in the expectation that they could stay to the age of 13. If my right hon. Friend has evidence to support that proposition, the matter is so disgraceful that it will be remarkable if Labour Members do not make speeches, asking Ministers to reconsider. Does my right hon. Friend really think that he has got that right? It would be disgraceful.

Mr. Forth: If my hon. Friend is suggesting that my remarks will provoke a cacophony of speeches from Labour Members, I am in two minds about that. My hon. Friend may be surprised to hear that a part of me would welcome that. I would welcome some sign of life from Labour Members. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] We have had the disgraceful experience of considering this important Bill in proper detail, scrutinising it— *[Interruption.]* We have had several thoughtful and relevant contributions from Conservative Members. Labour Members appear to be capable of little more than baying, giggling, laughing and being inattentive to the Committee's proceedings; they have made no contribution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls) suggested that, were the line of argument that I was pursuing to be as I have set it out, he would expect Labour Members to respond. I wish that they would, so that we could hear what they think about the circumstances. Before the general election, one of their senior spokesmen gave a solemn undertaking to parents and schools, on which those parents and schools acted in all reasonableness, only to find that when the Labour party had won the election, having asked people to trust it, the first thing that it did was to break that trust appallingly.

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose—*

Mr. Fallon *rose—*

Mr. Forth: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce).

Mr. Bruce: As he is an attentive attender in the House, my right hon. Friend knows that every time that we challenge the Government on why they are doing something, they tell us that they have a mandate. They say that they set out clearly what they would do if elected

and that they received an overwhelming vote, so they will implement the policy. Surely this is the policy for which they have the mandate—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. There is far too much noise in the Committee. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that hon. Members agree that there is far too much noise. The Minister and those who intervene must address their remarks to the amendments before us. *[Interruption.]* Order. Talk of mandates or otherwise is not the subject before us at the moment; the amendments are before us, and I must be firm at this late hour.

I am

Mr. Forth: Indeed, Mr. Martin.

We are discussing the age at which a child may be entitled to proper education within the assisted places scheme. The thrust of my argument so far, at this early stage, and the evidence that I am setting before the Committee are directed exactly to that point.

Having quoted a letter from the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools, which in turn quoted a letter from the hon. Member for Walton, the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, I move on to a letter from the Department of 4 June, a very recent letter. It was addressed to the chairman of the IAPS from a senior official. I shall not read the entire letter because you would not want me to delay the Committee, Mr. Martin.

The key element says:

"essentially the Bill takes a different approach to that envisaged by Mr. Kilfoyle. The Bill's proposals have been framed deliberately by reference the pupil's age whereas Mr. Kilfoyle's letter implies the approach will take account of the age range of the school at which the pupil holds the place."

We have the remarkable phenomenon, unknown to me in my experience in the House or in government, that a senior official in the Department is, in terms, confirming that there is a complete difference between an undertaking given by a Labour party education spokesman before the general election and the approach that is now being taken by the Government in introducing the Bill. That is the essence of the breach of trust that we are now discussing.

Mr. Fallon: Is my right hon. Friend taking up not simply a breach of trust but a breach of contract? Does not the subsection go to the heart of contractual law? We are talking not of a manifesto pledge or how that is interpreted but a breach of contract. Is that not so?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes an important point. At this stage in our proceedings, however, I do not believe that it is for me to judge whether he is correct. I believe that there is at least a question whether the difference to which I have been drawing attention involves not only a breach of trust, which I think that I have established beyond doubt, but a breach of contract. It may involve also, for all I know, breaches of the European convention on human rights. That will have to be taken into consideration.

Mr. Swayne: Will my right hon. Friend comment on the possibility that parents could have recourse to the European Court of Human Rights as a consequence of Labour's determination to bring rights home?

Mr. Forth: I think that my hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. The Chamber must be quieter. That applies to right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the Committee. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) was a Minister, and he is well aware of the rules of the House of Commons. He will be aware that the Committee must talk about the amendment. I am not looking for Members to read letters into the record. There must be a discussion of the amendment.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Martin, and I will endeavour to adhere strictly to it. My amendments seek to put right the terrible wrong that is done in the Bill as drafted.

A number of children who are being excellently educated under the assisted places scheme had every reasonable expectation of being educated to the age of 13 in a school where that was the age at which pupils normally transferred to secondary education. As a result of the provisions of the Bill, and especially of clause 2, that is no longer the case. The difference that I was highlighting to the Committee confirms that.

None other than the hon. Member for Walton confirmed in his letter of 1 April confirmed that that was an issue and that he should give a reasonable undertaking to those concerned, to ensure that there was no doubt about the matter.

In our amendments, we seek to honour that undertaking, even if the hon. Gentleman's own colleagues will not do so. It is a matter of great regret that the hon. Gentleman is not a Minister in the Department for Education and Employment, where he might have been expected to honour his own pledge. He has been moved sideways, and we now know why. It was presumably hoped that we would not notice, but we have noticed. The Committee has noticed, and it is to our great regret that the hon. Gentleman is not in a position to honour his pledge.

Our amendments are designed to ensure not only that the children can receive the education, but that the schools concerned can provide the education to the age of 13 that they would have expected when they made the appropriate arrangements.

The next point that I want to take up flows from a comment made earlier by the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Wallsend—

Mr. Byers: Tyneside, North.

Mr. Forth: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman—Tyneside, North. I made a note of his words, listening carefully as I always do to what he said. He said—almost incredibly in the light of the debate that we have had—that parents would rejoice at the measures in the Bill.

I have a letter that I received this morning from one of my constituents, who telephoned me in a state of distress about the proposals for the assisted places scheme. In the light of what the Minister of State said, it is pertinent for the Committee to understand what a real person with real children at a real school said. "Rejoice" is not a word which my constituent has used. She wrote:

"Our daughter, aged 10, gained her assisted place in February 1996 and took up her place at Croydon High School in September 1996. She is particularly bright, and she has just proved in the last two sets of exams that she has enormous ability, being in the top four of her year, justifying her place. Moreover, she understands fully that she has an assisted place and like her brother is committed to working hard. Both children are very happy in their schools."

[Mr. Forth]

In the next paragraph of her letter, my constituent gives the lie to the flippant remarks made by Labour Members about those in receipt of assisted places help. She states:

"We qualify under the assisted places scheme because my husband is severely disabled with manic depression, compounded by other physical disabilities including a skull and brain injury. He spends long periods of time in hospital and our only income is the disability living allowance and carer's allowance and incapacity benefit. Our only asset is our home and a dwindling amount of savings, left over from the days when he was able to work. I suffer from a neck injury which was the result of a car accident some three years ago. . . It is obviously very hard for me to find employment. Given the destructive nature of manic depression, my main aim is for our household to run as normally as possible and ensure that the children grow up"—

Mr. Maude: On a point of order, Mr. Martin. Many of us have been present for the debate all evening and take the matter extremely seriously. The debate is about the right of children to receive the education that has been contracted for. Is it appropriate for the Government Benches to be filled with hon. Members who have been brought in from all parts of the building in various states of refreshment, who clearly have no interest in the debate? It should be placed on the record that they are spending their time giggling, chatting to each other and taking no interest—

The First Deputy Chairman: Who comes into the Chamber is not a matter for the Chair. However, I must appeal again for quietness when an hon. Member is addressing the Committee.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to you, Mr. Martin, and I am truly grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude). I am attempting to bring to the Committee the real case of a constituent of mine who contacted me this morning to tell me of her desperate anxieties about the Bill.

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. I want to hear about the amendments, not the Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "That is what he is doing."] Order. It is all right for hon. Members to say that that is what the right hon. Gentleman is doing, but I can hear the right hon. Gentleman, and he is talking about the Bill. I want to hear about the amendments.

Mr. Forth: That is absolutely correct, Mr. Martin. The amendments concern the ability of parents to be confident that their children can receive an education through to the age of 13 and beyond where that is appropriate. That is the context in which I believe that a genuine individual case is relevant.

But I confess that I also wanted to take this opportunity to pick up a point made by none other than the Minister himself when earlier he said that parents would rejoice at the Bill. This individual case is very poignant. The next paragraph of the letter relates directly to the amendments. It says:

"like most parents we thought that by taking up such a place, our children's education would be honoured as long as they continued to perform to a level which justified this place, ie until they reached 18 years. It has been with an increasing sense of frustration and anxiety that we learn that our second child is to lose this place . . . The toll that this additional stress is taking on my husband's health is incalculable."

The letter goes on, but I shall not read it all to the Committee.

To meet a point raised earlier, I am more than happy to put the letter on the record so that the Committee can consider it. As has been pointed out, for a party which often claims some monopoly of care and compassion, the Labour party is showing precious little sign of any of that in tonight's proceedings.

I have set the scene for that part of the case that I wanted to make and I shall now make the briefest reference to amendment No. 28. That amendment seeks to ensure, for avoidance of doubt, that

"Unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that the pupil in question will receive secondary education which is comparable to the primary education which he has received in regard to . . . its religious content; . . . the curriculum provided; . . . opportunities for sport; . . . size of classes; and . . . single-sex provision, he"—

the Secretary of State—

"shall determine that that pupil shall continue to hold that place during the period which he receives secondary education."

That amendment is crucial in one important respect, to which we shall return in later amendments because we want to develop the argument. It is simply that we must find a mechanism whereby even if the Bill ends the benefits of an assisted place to a young person, the alternative provision in the state sector, about which the Under-Secretary of State spoke so proudly earlier, will be fully as good, and guaranteed to be fully as good, to every child who may lose his or her provision under the assisted places scheme. That is what we are asking, and what we hope that the amendments will achieve. I am sure that my arguments will be developed by my hon. Friends when they speak. We wish to provide a mechanism that will give the guarantee that parents deserve that the alternative provision will be every bit as good.

I have kept my remarks deliberately brief because I wish to allow my hon. Friends to develop the arguments. I hope, however, that I have given the Committee enough of a flavour of the thrust of our amendments and that the arguments will be developed further.

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—[*Mr. Nick Brown.*]

Committee report progress; to sit again this day.

Orsett Hospital, Thurrock

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

1.16 am

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): The subject of my Adjournment debate is Orsett hospital, which is situated in the borough of Thurrock. I speak on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Angela Smith), who has yet to make her maiden speech. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Adjournment debates are very important to Back-Bench Members, and we must give the hon. Gentleman a hearing.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am grateful for your assistance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The debate is important to me and to my constituents, who are aggrieved by the way that the Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS trust has behaved over Orsett hospital. As I was saying before the interruption, I speak on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon. I wish to make it clear that the Basildon constituency that she represents is different from the Basildon constituency in the previous Parliament. Approximately one third of my hon. Friend's constituency is situated in the borough of Thurrock, and Orsett hospital is just within the boundaries of her constituency.

By way of background, I wish to point out that Basildon and Thurrock are two separate urban areas. The equivalent of mountains and rivers separates them and there is no relationship between them that facilitates having one district general hospital for both areas. Going back in history a little, I should point out that Basildon is a new town and had large resources applied to it in decades past. It was deemed that the town should have its own general hospital. Nobody foresaw that policies would change and that the way in which health care was delivered would shift so that one district general hospital would serve the two urban areas of Basildon and Thurrock.

Thurrock has had a district general hospital, and it was known as Orsett hospital. The site of the hospital has been occupied for 100 years by buildings connected with the poor law or used as a hospital. Orsett hospital is situated between the two urban areas and was built some 30 years ago. It is a relatively modern building which functioned as a full district general hospital with an accident and emergency department, and it provided acute care, including intensive care, cardiac beds and maternity services.

Just over 10 years ago, the health authority decided to close the maternity unit and centralise provision at Basildon hospital. Understandably, there was a strong local outcry, but the health authority gave assurances to, primarily, the people of Thurrock—but also the people of Basildon—that better provision would ensue. It also suggested that that was the last change that would be made.

Then, in 1990, the then health authority announced its decision to close the accident and emergency department at Orsett hospital and to centralise all the facilities at Basildon, which is not a central point for the two urban areas. It said that acute surgery and intensive care, including cardiac care, would also go to Basildon. Again there was a massive outcry, met by assurances—which are not worth the paper that they are written on—from the health authority about the future.

We think that the shift of A and E services to Basildon—along with many other services—is perverse, given Thurrock's riparian, industrial, Lowryesque urban area, which runs some 14 miles along the river. There is a large amount of industry: the Lakeside shopping park—which 25 million people visit each year—and the various petrochemical industries. Thurrock is probably the biggest and fastest-growing residential area in the south-east.

People may ask why anyone should make such a perverse decision of centralising at Basildon, rather than centring services in Orsett. One reason is that the surgeons and consultants who largely influence and run the health service wanted the convenience of being closer to the private hospital—Nuffield hospital, at Brentwood. That has been one of the driving factors in the perverse location and centring of so many important services.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I am sure that it was due to an oversight that the hon. Gentleman forgot to mention that my constituency also uses the Orsett and Basildon complex. I share his concern that Orsett hospital should be kept, and kept in good order, for the use of his constituents and those of the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith). Is it not true, however, that the last Government found an extra £18 million that has helped to provide Orsett with a new eye unit that is servicing the whole of Essex, that there is a brand new minor injuries unit and that many of the maternity wings that were once a feature of Orsett hospital have been rehoused in very nice new facilities, including the Thurrock community hospital? Are there not three good new institutes in my constituency, in the Wickford and Billericay area?

Mr. Mackinlay: I am disappointed by the hon. Lady's intervention. She knows that much of what she has said is nonsense. She referred to the minor injuries unit. I do not want to introduce politics into the debate, but the mess that we are in is due to the stewardship of the health service by the Conservative Government sustained by the hon. Lady and the former Member of Parliament for Basildon. The minor injuries unit is an insult: it is little more than a temporary hut. It is a sop and a charade.

The trust that we now have has disregarded the wishes and legitimate interests of the people of Thurrock, primarily, but also those of the people of Basildon. It has no regard for consultation. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister cannot intervene in a management decision, but I hope that, as a consequence of my remarks, he may feel able at least to go back to the regional executive of the national health service and say that he is concerned about the stewardship of hospital facilities by Basildon hospital trust, in connection with both its style of management and the extent to which it consults. Time and again, it has said one thing and done another.

I consider the management incompetent. I bear no malice towards the chief executive, but she is a woman who has been promoted completely out of her depth. I noted that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, served on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration Select Committee, which invited that woman to reconsider her position. She is not competent to run the trust.

[Mr. Mackinlay]

The whole style of the trust, including the executive and non-executive directors, leaves a lot to be desired. I understand that the chief executive is the spouse of the clinical director. That is not good, sound management, given the line management responsibility. The whole problem should be examined root and branch, because there is no confidence in the conduct of the trust. I cannot overstate that point.

In 1994, during the last stages of the old health authority, the closure of Orsett hospital was considered. We feel that that is now the trust's underlying intention to effect that closure. The King's Fund was invited to consider the proposal to close the trust, which it found to be flawed. The health plans were subsequently altered.

The community health council, Thurrock borough council and I have always been realistic. We have never wanted to fight yesterday's battles. We have never suggested that we can put the clock back and restore everything to Orsett hospital, certainly not in the medium term. However, we thought that we had reached an agreement whereby the health service and hospital facilities would gradually be developed throughout the borough. We thought that the Orsett hospital site would be retained, and that a network of extensive and real minor injuries units would be provided around the borough and in the Basildon area.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) talked nonsense. No doctor is available in the so-called minor injuries unit placed at Orsett hospital, and its structure suggests that the firm intention is that it should be only a temporary provision.

In January 1996, the new trust submitted a planning application to develop five sixths of the Orsett hospital site without consulting the health authority. The community health council was not consulted—as was its statutory right, and neither were the borough council and the local Members of Parliament. That is indicative of the trust's arrogant behaviour. We extracted some recognition of that from the chief executive of the health authority at a planning inquiry just under two weeks ago. He said that a planning application was premature.

Subsequently, a new planning application was submitted: it was a minor variation on the same theme. The health authority has now approved that latter proposal. Well it would, wouldn't it? No one believes that it is anything other than the health authority and the trust closing ranks. It shows the arrogant approach that is being taken, and it is to the disadvantage of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon.

I want to stress the fact that the community health council has not been consulted. The trust recently argued that it had consulted on the health plan for Thurrock, as it was a change in service provision. However, neither the trust nor the health authority have denied the fact that there was no consultation on the proposal for the disposal of the land asset. That is fundamental. No consultation has taken place on the proposal to declare the land at Orsett redundant or surplus to health service requirements. The community health council and others are entitled to be consulted on that.

The decision is perverse because Basildon hospital has a problem of capacity. It cannot absorb and meet the legitimate needs of the people of Basildon and Thurrock. The planning application is being bounced through the trust's decision-making process and that of the health authority. If it is allowed to proceed, the option for wiser counsels to prevail in future years and for major hospital services to be returned to the Orsett site will be closed down. Those services will demonstrably be needed if Thurrock grows. The existing health plan for Thurrock has limited time horizons because its figures extend only to 2001. As I have said, it is one of the fastest-growing areas in the south-east of England.

I implore the Minister to consider this wholly unsatisfactory state of affairs. I know that hon. Members feel aggrieved that, all over the country, accident and emergency departments are being closed and specialist services are being centred in one area. I understand the argument about creating areas of excellence, but this is different, because we are not debating one urban area. The services are not located between the two urban areas, so there is no logicality. The people in many parts of Thurrock that are furthest from Basildon hospital are among the poorest, most disadvantaged and least mobile anywhere. Basildon hospital is far from them.

The people of Basildon and Thurrock have found that the management, competence and delivery of services leave a lot to be desired. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, served on a Select Committee which showed the incompetence of the current management. I understand that the chief executive's total remuneration package in 1995 was £88,000 a year. The highest-paid director has a total remuneration package of £95,000 a year. I mention that in passing.

It is grossly irritating to the people of Thurrock to know that those people are being paid such large sums when the experience of everyone in Basildon and Thurrock is that the hospital provision is not being delivered competently. The people who run the trust have been grossly selfish and the non-executive directors are insensitive and largely unknown to the communities over whose interests they are supposed to have stewardship.

I hope that the Minister will say that, although he may want to examine what I have said, he will nevertheless tell the regional executive of the national health service that there must be greater scrutiny of the actions and decisions of the trust in future. In addition, the health authority needs to show more backbone in standing up to the trust and in protecting its rights and those of the people it is trying to serve.

The community health council is entitled in law to be consulted, and I hope that, as a result of this debate, there will be a moratorium on the progressing of the planning application for land which is demonstrably not redundant or surplus to requirements. That would give great heart to people in Thurrock and Basildon.

1.32 am

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I agree with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). My interest in this matter is that, while I represent a north Essex constituency, on the county council I represent the division of Orsett and Stifford.

I entirely support my hon. Friend's conclusions about the hospital and its site. He will recall that, when the health authority attempted to consult local people, it could not at first find a hall big enough to accommodate all those who wished to attend. When it eventually used

almost the largest public hall in Thurrock, hundreds of people had to stand outside on a bitterly cold night. Despite that, the health authority proceeds apace with plans that clearly are not in accord with the wishes of the people of Thurrock.

As I say, I endorse my hon. Friend's views about the hospital, and I hope that, even at this late hour—both in terms of the people we represent and in our terms—the whole issue of the proper use of the site will be reviewed.

1.34 am

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) on securing the debate and on arguing his constituents' case so forcefully. I thank the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) for their remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock knows that, in a previous guise, I visited Orsett hospital to accompany my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Ms Smith) when she was the prospective parliamentary candidate. I am delighted to see her in her place. I am familiar with some of the background to some of the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock raises.

I can understand the concern of local people about the closure of Orsett's accident and emergency department in 1991. I also appreciate the concern about plans to move services away from Orsett and to dispose of some of the site. In the circumstances, I can appreciate why my hon. Friends would like the whole Orsett site to be retained in the national health service so that, at some future time, the hospital might be expanded and an accident and emergency department for Thurrock residents reintroduced. I shall return to that issue.

The current position, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock is aware, is that Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS trust, which owns the Orsett site, is seeking planning permission for housing on part of the site that it will not require. Progress on the development of alternative services at Basildon hospital and disposal of property at Orsett depend on the outcome of the planning inquiry, which took evidence last month.

Whatever we may think of the decision to move hospital services away from Orsett, it must be right to dispose of property that no longer has a health service purpose in the most appropriate way possible. Proceeds from the disposal of surplus assets are ploughed back into patient care. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House would like more resources to go into front-line patient services since we know that they are desperately needed.

The reconfiguration of hospital services is part of the local health strategy—the health plan for Thurrock, developed by South Essex health authority. I need therefore to talk briefly about the plan. My comments should not be taken as providing any sort of ministerial endorsement or otherwise either of the plan itself or of the process by which it was developed but rather just to aid our understanding of the local situation.

First, I appreciate the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock about population growth in the Thurrock area. He is quite right to highlight that issue. Industry and commerce are being attracted successfully into the Thurrock area, and the population is increasing at a faster rate than in the south Essex area as a whole. The forecast growth in Thurrock's population is clearly rapid, and it is important that local health services are developed accordingly.

The health authority takes the view that the population increase does not justify an additional general hospital in the foreseeable future and that to allow for one would not be a good use of health service resources. Of course, the health authority accepts the need for improved services, and that is reflected in the health plan, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock knows, has two main elements: investment of more resources in community and primary health care services and the development of high-technology, general hospital in-patient health services at Basildon hospital to provide a single centre of excellence serving the population of Basildon and Thurrock.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock has expressed his concern about the accessibility of Basildon hospitals to Thurrock residents in correspondence with me. It is a very important issue and I hope that the health plan recognises the need for improvement on it. I understand, for example, that car parking at Basildon hospital is planned to be almost doubled in the near future. The health authority is discussing public transport and the possibility of enhancing the hospital and voluntary transport scheme with Essex county council and Thurrock borough council.

Orsett hospital will continue to provide out-patient, day and diagnostic services. Indeed, there will be no change for an estimated 90 per cent. of the patients who currently use Orsett. I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock that not all the surplus land will be disposed of. Some will be retained in case there is a need for some expansion of services on the site in future.

I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend said about consultation, and I have listened to the points that have been made to me directly by the community health council, which clearly feels that the consultation process has been far from adequate.

The health authority has provided me with a briefing that gives its perspective on the consultation that has been undertaken on the health plan for Thurrock. As consultation on substantial service change is subject to statute, it would be inappropriate for me to express an opinion on whether consultation has been undertaken properly in this case.

It is my understanding that the CHC was consulted on the plan during the formal consultation period, which began in early 1995, and that it received meeting agendas and reports on the plan, including the paper that set out in detail the decision to declare areas of Orsett hospital surplus.

A chief concern of the CHC is that land should not be sold without alternative provision being in place. I have received a letter from the local CHC arguing that case. I understand that the health authority has consistently given the undertaking that it would not discontinue or transfer any service from Orsett until appropriate alternatives were provided, either within the community or at Basildon hospital.

Once the planning situation is clear—it is likely to be some time before the outcome of the current planning inquiry is known—the trust will be in a position to refine

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

its plan for restructuring hospital services. The trust has been given outline business case approval for its restructuring plans under the private finance initiative on the basis of the outline proposals. It will need to obtain final business case approval from the NHS executive before going ahead with the procurement and associated disposals.

My hon. Friend has my assurance that the capital development will not be approved until we are satisfied that there are clear benefits for patients, and that the process of disposal and procurement can be handled in such a way that services are not closed before alternative services are made available. In view of my hon. Friend's concerns, which I know are shared by other Labour Members, I shall instruct the NHS executive specifically on this point. I hope that that goes part of the way towards satisfying the concerns of my hon. Friend and his constituents.

My hon. Friend made some remarks about the role of individuals. It would not be appropriate to comment on such roles, although it is incumbent on all servants of the NHS, whether in an executive or non-executive capacity, to ensure that the planning and delivery of local services properly reflects local views. My hon Friends may be assured that one of our priorities is to ensure that the boards of all NHS organisations are properly representative of the communities they serve.

I listened carefully to what my hon. Friends said about the condition of local health services. This and other such debates will inform the changes that we will need to make to restore the NHS to a proper condition with the services that local people should expect to receive. Those changes will be properly thought through and tested, and will be introduced sensitively, but changes there will be to ensure that local hospitals are able to provide a proper health care service in tune with our founding principles for the NHS.

It is particularly important, in my view, that we restore local accountability and local confidence. The way in which services are run and the way in which they develop must be properly in tune with local needs and local views. One of our priorities is to ensure that those who lead local services are properly representative of the communities they serve.

In the meantime, I will want to see those responsible for health services in Basildon and Thurrock, like everywhere else in the country, making every effort, under the present arrangements, to ensure that local views are taken into account fully in the planning and delivery of local services.

Mrs. Gorman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate for the Minister completely to ignore the fact that Basildon, Thurrock and Billericay are concerned in the hospital development? Billericay is my constituency, and it is not been mentioned once in the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): That is not an appropriate point of order in this debate.

Mr. Milburn: I have already paid due regard to the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). Moreover, as this Adjournment debate has been secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock, and because time is short, I am attempting to deal with his specific concerns. I should be grateful if, for a moment, the hon. Lady would contain herself.

I assure hon. Members that, so far as possible, the development and reconfiguration of local health services in the Basildon and Thurrock areas will go with the grain of local opinion. It is extremely important that we achieve that objective, and I expect everyone concerned to make every effort to ensure that we do so. Labour Members are right to insist that no facilities at Orsett should be closed until alternative services are available and that local undertakings on the matter must be honoured. As I said, I shall instruct the NHS executive to ensure that those guidelines are followed.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock feels that such action shows progress and helps to meet some of the concerns that he has articulated so clearly in this debate on behalf of his constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 6 June 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Governance of London

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Ms Bridget Prentice.]*

9.34 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): As a London Member, a Minister with special London responsibilities and a long-time London resident, it is a great honour for me to open the debate, and it is a great pleasure to do so with an excellent attendance for a Friday, particularly on the Back Benches behind me. I very much welcome the many hon. Members—many newly elected to the House—who have come to show their support for the Government's policies for the future of London.

The fact that we are having this debate so soon after taking office demonstrates the priority that we attach to London, and our determination to see early action to right its wrongs—wrongs that have seen our capital city rudderless and without a voice for 11 long years, following the spiteful, short-sighted and anti-democratic decision of the former Government to abolish the Greater London council. The consequent lack of leadership has seriously damaged the ability of our capital city to fight effectively its corner in the national and international arenas and has left London showing all too many signs of a lack of co-ordination in planning, transport and in the state of its environment.

This is not the first time that the governance of the capital has been debated in this House or, indeed, the other place, but it is the first time for almost 20 years that there is a Government in Westminster who give the governance of our capital city the priority that it deserves.

The fact that London is the only western capital without an elected citywide government is not just an affront to the people of our city. It also puts London at a disadvantage. That is bad not only for London but the country as a whole. It is time that there was a new deal for London and, following the decisive verdict of the electorate in London and, indeed, throughout Britain in the recent general election, a new deal there will be.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I apologise for intervening this early in the Minister's speech, but I do so for this reason. When the Minister uses the term "London" in his remarks today, will he have a rigid idea in his mind about London as presently defined, or will he—among all the other reviews that he will no doubt discuss, in tune with the mood of the moment—be prepared to review what London is for the purposes of the argument that he will probably go on to make about governance, mayors and so on?

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I shall try to respond visually. This is the map of London following the general election—

Madam Speaker: Order. The Minister must articulate what he is saying and not show us maps.

Mr. Raynsford: I am sure that Conservative Members do not need a painful reminder of the political map of London following the election on 1 May.

The right hon. Gentleman will know perfectly well that the geographical boundary of London has been set for some time and it embraces the 32 London boroughs and the City corporation. That was the former GLC area. That is the area of London for London government purposes, and that is what we are talking about at the moment. The issue of the future geographical boundary of London will be covered in the Green Paper that will be issued in due course.

There is, quite rightly, widespread public interest in the subject of how London is governed. That was well demonstrated by the packed houses and animated discussion in the series of debates on the future of London organised by the Architecture Foundation and the *Evening Standard* last year. There is also a very real determination among Londoners to ensure that we create the right structures for our city. I share that determination. Londoners know that the current system of government in the city cannot be allowed to continue.

The public debate—although not, I suspect, the political instincts of the neanderthal tendency of the Conservative party—has moved on from whether London should have a strategic authority to what form that authority should take. That is also what London's business community is saying. Yesterday's *Financial Times* reported research by the London Chamber of Commerce, which was reinforced by a letter in today's *Financial Times* from the director of the chamber of commerce, confirming that 75 per cent. of the capital's business leaders view the present arrangements for governing London as inadequate. It said:

"a city-wide authority will bring a much needed sense of identity and enable us better to promote and defend the interest of the capital nationally and internationally. We warmly welcome proposals to make decision making in London more transparent and democratic".

We agree. Our manifesto made clear our commitment. That is why, following a referendum of Londoners to confirm popular demand, we will introduce legislation to provide for a strategic authority, made up of both a directly elected mayor and a directly elected authority.

The new authority and mayor will work together for the good of London, speak up for the capital city's needs and plan for its future. They will not duplicate the work of boroughs, but take responsibility for London-wide issues such as transport, planning, policing, economic regeneration and environmental protection.

That will be a totally new style of strategic authority, drawing on the lessons of the past from this country and overseas and designed to meet the challenges of the future. It will not be a new GLC. The clear message from business, the voluntary sector, local government and the

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public in London is that they want a streamlined and effective authority that is able to tackle the real problems that confront London today.

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): The hon. Gentleman says that the plan would not be for a new-style Greater London council. I take it that he accepts that the old-style GLC did not serve the purposes of London correctly, because he proposes something different. If that is true, he presumably endorses the previous Government's decision to alter the structure of London government by doing away with the GLC.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening when I opened my speech with a reference to what I described as the spiteful, short-sighted and anti-democratic decision of the former Government unilaterally to abolish a tier of government without giving the people of London any say at all in the matter. We deplore that. We believe that times move on. We are talking about a different situation and the needs for the 1990s and the 21st century. The structures that we propose are appropriate for that new period.

The GLC performed many valuable services and the people of London were outraged at the former Government's decision to abolish it, but we would not claim that everything was right, and we recognise that, in the GLC's previous arrangements, which were put in place by a Conservative Government, there was too often confusion between the boroughs and the GLC. That is why, in our new framework, we seek a clear separation so that the new strategic authority will focus only on strategic issues that have to be dealt with across London as a whole, whereas the boroughs will continue to be the main agents for service delivery at local level to ensure that proper separation and to minimise the prospects of the overlap that did occur with the GLC.

Mr. Forth: While on this point of definition, which will be central to the development of the argument as we go on, is the Minister satisfied that he has a clear idea in his mind of the likely division of responsibilities, powers, duties and perhaps tax-raising powers between the boroughs, the strategic authority and the executive mayor? That is a three-way split, not a two-way split. Is he satisfied that he has cracked that one?

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman strays into territory that I think, with reflection, he may wish he had not entered into. If he wishes to consider the current structure of government in London, he will find not a three-way split, but approximately a 150-way split. Perhaps he has seen the organogram—I think that that is the technical word for it—devised by Mr. Tony Travers, an expert on the subject, at the London school of economics. The organogram shows a maze of lines going in every direction, trying to bring together the huge, myriad organisations, many of them totally undemocratic and unaccountable, that contribute to the government of London.

We are about ending that confusion and lack of accountability. We are about creating a simpler, streamlined, effective structure that will give the government that Londoners need and that will distinguish properly—as I said in my answer to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant)—the strategic functions that must be dealt with at a strategic London-wide level, from the local functions that are best handled by the London boroughs. There is no duplication and no overlap in that. It defines separate functions and ensures that they are discharged at the appropriate level.

Londoners want an authority that is able to fulfil the strategic and democratic needs of this great city. They want it to be inclusive, to listen to the views of Londoners and to build a consensus. They want it to rid London of the confusion, duplication and waste that they currently see and to help the city develop in a sustainable way.

The authority must, therefore, be streamlined and effective, with strong leadership that is able to get things done. It must be free of the draining and undermining effects of undue bureaucracy. It must focus on providing a powerful voice for London and on sorting out the real problems that London faces. It must be directly accountable to Londoners and reflect the priorities and aspirations of local people, local businesses and other organisations, not least in the voluntary sector, that work in our capital city. It will work closely with all of them and promote partnership and joint working, but, at the same time, it must be structured to avoid duplication of responsibilities and the opportunities for conflict and waste.

Over recent years, one of the healthy developments in London has been the creation of sectoral and geographical partnerships, often bringing local authorities, business and the community together in practical programmes to tackle problems and issues. The list is too long to name them all, but I should like to assure them that this Government fully support their efforts and intend that the new authority should help them to build on what has already been achieved.

I should also like to commend the growing involvement of the business community in projects and activities that promote the capital and deal with its problems. We are fully aware that, without the business community, London would be nothing. We intend to ensure that the new authority works to support the business life of London and that it works closely with the business community.

London needs strong leadership to tackle its problems and to seize the opportunities. For the past 11 years, there has been no answer to the question, "Who runs London?" What a demeaning position for one of the greatest cities in the western world. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Front-Bench Members seem to express surprise at the question of who runs London. I remind the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) that he recently aspired to be the Minister with responsibility for London, although he represented a constituency somewhere in Suffolk. What an insult to London that the Minister given designated responsibility for speaking for Londoners did not represent a London constituency. We are not going to allow that nonsense to continue.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will the hon. Gentleman tell me what the answer would be to the question of who runs London when there is both a mayor and an executive authority? Who runs London—the mayor or the executive authority?

Mr. Raynsford: If the right hon. Gentleman had the patience to wait, he would hear, and if he waits a little longer, he will find the answer fully spelled out in the Green Paper that we will publish in due course.

Mr. Forth: A Green Paper—well!

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman expresses surprise. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that we are pressing ahead quickly with our reforms. Our first priority will be to publish a Green Paper next month setting out the key principles that we intend to follow and seeking Londoners' views on the details. We are committed to restoring democratic, citywide government, but we genuinely want to hear the views of London organisations and Londoners before coming to firm conclusions on how it is best done.

There will therefore be a three-month consultation period, enabling Londoners to tell us what they want, and London organisations to consult their members and provide their considered views. We want to be sure that the new authority commands the respect of the people, meets their aspirations and is a body that they can do business with.

We shall shortly introduce legislation to provide for a referendum to coincide with the borough council elections next May. That will give the people of London a chance to confirm whether they wish us to establish the new authority, which will be fully described in a White Paper before the referendum.

The referendum will also give the new authority the democratic credibility that it needs, and—I ask Conservative Members to listen carefully at this point—will make it more difficult for any future Government of a different political persuasion, if there ever is one, to abolish or alter its responsibilities without taking into account the views of the people of London.

Mr. Forth *rose—*

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I shall give way first to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and then to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone).

Mr. Forth: I offer, as an initial thought on which the Minister may wish to ponder, the question whether he would envisage building in, as part of the consultative process through the referendum, an option whereby boroughs are asked whether they want to be part of the great new futuristic structure. That strikes me as the ultimate in consulting local communities.

Mr. Raynsford: Clearly, the right hon. Gentleman did not listen carefully to my response to his earlier geographical question. We shall consult the people of London because we see the new body as a London-wide authority. It will not be a duplication of the boroughs. We certainly do not want all the focus to be on the delivery of services by boroughs. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman seems to have difficulty in understanding that idea.

When we talk about transport and environmental protection, we cannot work on a borough-by-borough basis. Pollution does not respect borough boundaries, and transport does not end at them. We must have a citywide approach, and an authority that considers the needs of the whole city.

I am sure that, on reflection, the right hon. Gentleman, who is at times an intelligent Member, will appreciate that for the services in question it is not possible to provide opt-outs that would allow individual boroughs to say, "We shall not contribute to the needs of the capital city, although we are part of it." That is a preposterous suggestion.

Mr. Gummer: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I said that I would give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East. I shall give way to the right hon. Gentleman afterwards.

Mr. Livingstone: Will my hon. Friend explain the form of the question to be put to Londoners? Are they to be offered a "take it or leave it" package, such as, "Do you want a mayor and an authority? Yes or no?" Will they be allowed to choose whether they want a mayor and an authority, or just an authority without a mayor? If we want real democratic legitimacy, Londoners should be able to vote on both parts of the structure separately.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend raises an interesting question. The detailed question to be put in the referendum will be decided between now and the end of the year, when we come to frame it. There will be plenty of time to discuss the exact wording.

However, I remind my hon. Friend that the Labour party won the election on a clear manifesto commitment to introduce a new strategic body comprising a directly elected mayor and a directly elected authority. We are committed to introducing that manifesto pledge, and we shall ensure that the people of London see us honour it.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I said that I would give way next to the former Secretary of State.

Mr. Gummer: May I take the Minister a little further along with the geographical point? Let us take a borough such as Dartford, whose boundaries with the borough of Bexley are sometimes difficult to distinguish. If Dartford decided that it would like to be part of the strategic authority, would it be allowed that choice? Conversely, if another borough—Bexley, let us say—decided that it did not want to be part of the strategic authority, would it be allowed to make that decision?

The difficulty is that the hon. Gentleman is pre-empting the area of the strategic authority. Perhaps he would like to think again about whether the present map of London as he sees it should be subject to some change at the edges.

Mr. Raynsford: I put it to the right hon. Gentleman, in the most charitable possible way, that he, as a former Secretary of State for the Environment, will know that

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issues involving boundaries and the division of responsibilities between local government organisations cannot be approached lightly, and generate a considerable amount of hot air, which he himself had to deal with in the previous Parliament.

I do not believe that it would be a helpful way in which to carry forward our clear manifesto commitment to give the people of London a strategic authority if we entered a prolonged and probably unproductive debate about precisely what the appropriate boundaries should be.

The right hon. Gentleman knows that the Conservative party established the Greater London council boundaries some years ago, and that in the intervening period he continued to legislate for London on the basis of those boundaries. They are the definition of London for the moment. I do not preclude the possibility of revisiting them in the future. However, to enter an exercise that is usually arcane, complex and ultimately, as the right hon. Gentleman, on reflection, will recognise, not always very productive, would not be the most appropriate way to proceed now.

Mr. Gummer: Surely that is a very "conservative" view of London. Is this not new Labour, which will change the entire world? Is this not the appropriate moment to ask ourselves whether, in the great surge of newness and novelty, the arcane and old-fashioned boundaries laid down by some past Conservative Government might just possibly be improved?

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman is trying to have it both ways. For one moment, I thought that he was about to say that he was changing his own view. We have seen some interesting examples of that recently. Some of his former colleagues, who campaigned until 1 May on the platform that the Greater London authority plan to which Labour was committed would be an absolute disaster, and would have no benefits for London whatever, have jumped ship extraordinarily rapidly, and announced their candidacy for the post of mayor within days, if not hours, of the electoral verdict on the right hon. Gentleman's party. For a moment, I thought that he, too, was about to declare his commitment to the brave new world that Labour is introducing.

We shall have no hesitation in introducing radical proposals involving a fundamental change in the way in which London is governed, which will give a bright future to local government and create an incentive for innovation. The Minister of State, Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), highlighted only yesterday the extent to which we shall encourage innovation—and where London leads, others may follow in the years ahead.

We have no anxieties at all about the radical nature of our proposals, and I ask the right hon. Gentleman whether it is not time for him—

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: Bear with me; I am answering an intervention from the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), and I indicated that, after that, I would give way to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

I was saying that the former Secretary of State might now think that it was time for him to perform a U-turn and accept that the position that his party adopted before the election—of opposing Londoners' right to their own directly elected authority—was a mistake, and that he, like Mr. Norris and Lord Archer, might conclude that it would probably be a good thing to have a strategic authority and a mayor for London.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Following the good question asked by the hon. Member for Brent, East, the former leader of the Greater London council, may I remind the Minister that the Labour manifesto did not commit itself to a one-question referendum? I therefore ask him to consider that matter as open for discussion.

Secondly, may I ask the Minister to be equally open on the question that gave his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister problems earlier this week—the sequence of events for the next 12 months? Will he at least consider whether, if we are to have a referendum, we can have a Bill on the referendum after the White Paper on the proposals?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman asked a couple of questions, and I shall take them in sequence. He knows what we said in our manifesto, and we regard that as fundamental. We are in the business of putting into effect our manifesto commitments and we shall not in any way resile from them. However, as he also knows, we are considering carefully the wording of the question to be put in the referendum and shall reach a view on it. I shall certainly listen carefully to any representations made by the hon. Gentleman or others in the months ahead.

As for the hon. Gentleman's second question—will he remind me what it was?

Mr. Hughes: My second question concerned the exchange between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on Wednesday as to the timetable of Bills, Green Papers and referendums.

Mr. Raynsford: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I have already spelt out the timetable, but I shall repeat it. We shall publish a Green Paper next month, and that will be followed by a three-month consultation period on its proposals. We will then introduce measures to allow the people of London an opportunity to reach a decision through a referendum.

A White Paper before the referendum will set out the detailed conclusions of the Government on the precise form of the new strategic authority that the people are being asked to endorse in a referendum. There will be an opportunity through the White Paper for Londoners to understand fully the proposals that they will be asked to endorse in a referendum.

Mr. Hughes: I accept what the Minister says, and that is a perfectly proper starting point. However, there is a strong case for saying that the sequence of events should be the other way round—that the White Paper should come before we consider the Bill and the referendum, as people should know what they are being asked to vote on.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. People should vote on a clear proposal to establish a

strategic authority, and they should know what is envisaged. The detailed Bill giving effect to that authority should come after the people have given their endorsement in a referendum to the point of principle. There will then be a full opportunity in the House and outside for people to put their views to us and to try to influence proceedings. There will be an opportunity for a full and proper discussion of the precise arrangements. That is the proper order that we will follow.

Ms Margaret Hodge (Barking): May I preface my remarks by congratulating my hon. Friend the Minister on the speed with which he has introduced a clear manifesto commitment that was overwhelmingly endorsed by the people of London? During the consultation process—either in the Green Paper or elsewhere—will Londoners have an opportunity to deliberate on whether there should be electoral reform of the way in which we elect both the mayor and the Greater London authority, so that Londoners have the same opportunity as those voting for a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly to find new ways of electing representatives?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend has been a great advocate of the reform of London government and of the concept of a mayor. She makes an interesting point on one of the most crucial issues that will need to be determined during the consultation period—the method of election for the strategic authority. I hope that she will accept that, at this stage, it would be improper for me to say more than that we will consult fully on that matter when we publish the Green Paper, and that we will set out our views on how we might proceed.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am grateful to the Minister, who has been most generous in giving way. In an answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the hon. Gentleman referred to authorities on the edge of London that might wish to change their relationship, and raised the possibility of a future referendum or even additional questions on the referendum paper. During the election campaign in my area, the governance of London was not an issue—although my area wishing not to be part of London any more was.

Mr. Raynsford: We have covered that issue in some detail, but I must make it clear that I did not suggest the possibility of a future referendum. I said that boundaries are not fixed immutably for ever and that it is a subject to which we may return, but I made no commitment on a referendum.

London clearly has a range of considerable strengths which place it at the very top of any league of world-class cities. It is well known that its financial and business service sectors are second to none; that London is a leading destination for international tourism, and is becoming more and more popular by the year; and that London's arts, culture and entertainment are truly world class and lead the way in terms of innovation and new ideas. There are many more successes to which I could point, and many more that the new mayor and assembly will strive to deliver.

For all those successes, there is a downside, reflected in the heavy price that many Londoners have to pay for living in the city. In my area of responsibility—and that of the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), who will reply to the debate—the issues of air quality, arising from the inexorable rise in traffic and congestion, the ever-present problem of homelessness, which is a deep shame to our city, and the growing numbers of long-term unemployed combine to undermine the hopes and aspirations of London and Londoners.

It will come as no surprise to many hon. Members that London has more unemployed people than Scotland and Wales combined—more than 300,000 at the last count. What is worse than those shameful figures is that more than 44 per cent. of London's unemployed have been out of work for a year or more. The proportion is also growing rapidly—up from 29 per cent. just five years ago.

Sixteen of the most deprived local authorities in England are found in London—many represented by my hon. Friends present in the Chamber this morning—and 14 of the 20 most deprived wards in England are found in London. Not only is London home to widespread deprivation, but the depth of that deprivation is severe. Some 64 per cent. of the most deprived local authority housing estates are in London and more than 700,000 tenants in the capital are reliant on housing benefit. Those statistics paint a very different picture from the one frequently used to portray London.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I am glad that my hon. Friend has drawn attention to the problems of poverty, long-term unemployment and deprivation throughout London, which, as he rightly said, are the worst in the country. However, the authority is not due to be elected until 2000. Do the Government intend to establish an economic development agency to promote employment prospects ahead of the installation of the new authority for London, so that we can begin to tackle those serious problems?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend makes a valid point, and he will know that the Government are committed to introducing measures during this Session to allow the establishment of regional development agencies throughout England. In London, we will proceed in parallel to establish a mechanism for regional development activity, which will have the added advantage of the democratic structure created by the Greater London authority to ensure that the regional development agency in London is subject to full democratic scrutiny.

The statistics paint a different picture from that frequently used to portray London—a picture of despair, neglect and waste, beneath the real successes and prosperity of our capital. They paint inexorably a picture of a divided city. One of the challenges facing all of us with responsibility for London is the need to overcome the very sharp divisions between wealth and poverty which so often sit side by side in our capital. Around the edges of the City of London—perhaps one of the richest communities in the world—we see areas of the deepest deprivation to be found anywhere in the western world.

I pay tribute to the excellent campaigning work by the *Evening Standard*, which a couple of years ago drew attention in a series of in-depth articles to the appalling quality of life endured by far too many people in east

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London. These divisions are unacceptable in a civilised society. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), who intervenes from a sedentary position, is an example of those divisions in London. He knows about the wealth of London. It would be appropriate for him to give some thought to the poverty that exists in our city.

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): Perhaps my comment was inaudible to the Minister, as it did not question the tenor of his argument. He mentioned the *Evening Standard*. I thought it appropriate to remind the Government that there is perhaps just enough time before the honours system is revised to give a knighthood to Mr. Max Hastings, who played such a conspicuous part in bringing this debate about and who, by his support for the Labour party, materially affected the result of the general election.

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman refers to the way in which many of the barons who run the press in this country have made an interesting change in their political allegiances in recent months. In the interests of not intruding into the private grief of the Conservative party, I will say no more about that important shift in public opinion. But I have paid tribute to the *Evening Standard*, and it is the tribute that is important—not the hollow gong that goes with it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: I have given way on a number of occasions and I now wish to make progress. There are many Members who wish to speak in the debate, and it is time we proceeded.

Our task is to build a united and successful London. We are a one-nation Government and our mission is to establish a one-city government in London, a citywide government that is inclusive, works in partnership with organisations and people, and, above all, works for the benefit of every citizen of London.

Finding lasting and sustainable solutions to the capital's problems will be the very stuff of the new authority. London has waited far too long for the opportunity to take charge of its own affairs. Our proposals will demonstrate the Government's commitment to local democracy and to maintaining London's rightful place at the top of the league of world cities. We want London to be a city in which everyone is able to take part in and share the capital's economic success.

We propose to introduce a slim, workmanlike strategic authority of a kind never before seen in this country. We propose a directly elected mayor, elected from a population of nearly 5 million voters, who will lead the fight against poverty, congestion and pollution and vigorously promote our capital city at home and abroad. Only by putting Londoners back in charge of London can we be assured of achieving our aim.

10.10 am

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): It might have been more helpful if the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) had started his speech the other way round, first discerning London's problems and then explaining how his propositions would deal with them. Instead, he started with the solution and ended with the problems. One of the first questions that we must ask ourselves is whether the proposals will help us towards that solution.

The hon. Gentleman perfectly properly said that London was a huge success and that it was at the top of every one of the international leagues. That might suggest that a reordering of government was not necessary. He went on to say that, in many areas, London suffered and could do better. I agree: he is quite right to point out that London, like most capital cities, has the extremes of success and failure. We need to concentrate on the improvement of the bad and the extension of the good.

The hon. Gentleman listed the problems, saying that he was most concerned about air quality, homelessness and unemployment, and that the strategic authority would do something about them; yet I did not hear him saying—perhaps I missed it—that homelessness would be one of the elements with which the authority would be concerned. Indeed, one of the problems with the Greater London council was that it had overlapping arrangements.

The hon. Gentleman has not so far managed to maintain the argument in its totality: he has not explained how the mixture that he presents will solve the problems that we can all agree on. Therefore, I want to examine the proposals—not in a spirit of unhappiness, as the Labour party won the election and did very well in London, which entitles it to makes its proposals—but because the Opposition also have every right to ensure that those proposals are as good as they can be. That is precisely what I intend to do.

Let us consider the proposals. First, there is the proposal about how we are to consider the issues. I have a genuine constitutional concern, as the referendum sits less easily in this country than in others because we are a parliamentary democracy. Therefore, the order in which things are done is extremely important, and the hon. Gentleman should think very carefully about that.

The problem with referendums is simple—in fact, they have often been used in many countries for the opposite of democracy—because a general, vague question is asked and the answer that people give is then used as a democratic excuse for doing whatever the Government they wanted to do in the first place. It is therefore important that, in making their decisions, the people of London know precisely what they are about.

A Green Paper has been suggested. Some of my hon. Friends may tease about the constant references to more and more commissions, investigations and so on, but I shall not do that. Obviously, it is perfectly reasonable to produce a Green Paper—as the proposals are not very precise—to discuss it, and then to produce a White Paper; but it seems to me that it would then be necessary to produce a Bill so that people can know precisely what is being proposed. That is so important because a parliamentary democracy is designed to ensure that the details are argued out in such a way as to ensure that all the difficulties are considered. It may be that, on reflection, the order proves to be wrong.

Mr. Raynsford *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I am not asking him for a solution now. I merely want

him to think along those lines. He may not change the conclusion that he has come to, but, in dealing with those matters, it would help if the Government at least gave the impression that they were thinking through the issues and would think again if sensible propositions were put to them.

Mr. Raynsford: I have already made it clear that we shall listen to sensible propositions. We have no difficulty with that. The right hon. Gentleman's argument might carry a little more force if the previous Government had followed the course that he now advocates when they abolished the Greater London council. No Bill was published in advance for Londoners to comment on; there was no opportunity for Londoners to express their view, and the GLC was abolished as an arbitrary act. That is a very different course from the one that the present Government will follow.

Mr. Gummer: I had not intended to be tempted into telling the hon. Gentleman exactly what I thought about his comments on the GLC, the abolition of which was extremely widely supported in London, and which was so expensive that he does not want to reinstate it. He used such a good phrase that I wrote it down: he said that the new authority would be of a kind never before seen in this country. That is because the kind of authority that has been seen before in London was so wholly unacceptable to Londoners.

It is most interesting that, in this debate, a phrase has crept out of the woodwork that was made illegal by Labour party apparatchiks during the general election campaign: the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) referred to a Greater London authority—it slipped out. Labour party members were not allowed to say that during the election campaign, because it might have brought back all those memories. If a public opinion poll asks whether people want a Greater London authority, the answer is no, no, no. The whole idea was to propose something different.

The Greater London authority that people remember is the authority that the Labour party turned into a leviathan whose tentacles were as far-reaching as those of Mr. Mandelson. The hon. Member for Barking said recently that she could be a bit freer because Mr. Mandelson's tentacles did not reach—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. The right hon. Gentleman knows not to refer to another hon. Member by name.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Member for Barking did not put it this way, but she said that the tentacles of the Minister without Portfolio did not reach where she was. The tentacles of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) reached all over London to such an extent that it felt as though he were throttling it.

I thought that it would be a valuable move quite simply to accept that the Labour party has won the election and has made its proposition, and therefore to consider how we can make that proposition as effective as possible.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for taking us through the important questions of the sequence. Does he imagine that the prospect of tax-raising powers—whether for an authority or for a mayor—might come into the equation at some stage, as the Minister has already given a slightly contradictory view about whether he is prepared to review the definition of London for the purposes of our discussions and the proposals?

Mr. Gummer: I hope to get on to tax raising because, when it comes to increasing tax in Scotland, the question is asked, but so far—I am sure that this is a matter of omission—there has been no commitment to ask that question of the people of London.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I do not want go into history, but the right hon. Gentleman's party set up the Greater London council and its powers remained unaltered throughout its existence. I ask him to be less confrontational. While I agree with him about the timetable, as not even the Labour party won the support of a majority of Londoners who voted, and as we need to proceed with public consent, does he agree that the proper course, if the public agree to the proposals, is for party, like the others, to support the proposition that London should be governed by Londoners? Will he commit his party's support if Londoners clearly voice their support?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will, when I have completed my investigation of where we should be going, see exactly where I stand. I have great difficulty with two of his points. First, I have difficulty with the concept that London is not governed by Londoners, because there are elected authorities all over London. Secondly, I have difficulty with his assumptions about the area of London with which we are concerned. I want to explore that. I hope that he will listen because I am trying not to be confrontational. Indeed, I was not being confrontational until the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich tempted me. I am afraid that, like Oscar Wilde, I fell for the temptation. I will not fall again unless tempted again.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: There is no one I would rather be tempted by.

Mr. Cohen: The right hon. Gentleman said that lots of London councils were governing London. Which of them should put in a bid for the World cup or other major events that would come to London as a whole?

Mr. Gummer: I was going to come to that important point. [HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I shall give enough answers to ensure that the Government will also have to give answers when I get to that point, but I must continue my argument.

The first question is by what process we decide the matter. I do not suggest that any particular method is perfect, but it is important for the people of London to know what they are being offered, because there are some very real questions. Who is going to make the decision?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I would like to see the right hon. Gentleman's smiling face from time to time. He has his back to me.

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to do that; the pleasure is mutual.

[Mr. Gummer]

I want to be sure that the people of London know who is in charge of what. I notice that there has been a subtle change in presentation since the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who spoke on London for Labour in opposition, ceased to do so. In those days we talked of two different things: an elected mayor and a strategic authority. That was because two different bits of the Labour party favoured the two options. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras favoured a strategic authority but not a mayor, while the Prime Minister favoured a mayor but was not keen on a strategic authority; so we got both. Now we have a sort of conflation of the two. The people of London must know which is to be the voice for London.

What happens if the directly elected mayor has a voice different from that of the strategic authority? Who will be the voice for London? Will it be the strategic authority with all its powers, or will it be the mayor? If the mayor says that London should host the World cup and the strategic authority, which has to get the money for it, says that it should not, who will win? The people of London need to know.

I know who will win: the Government. They will win because they will decide. If it is not to be the Government, there must be an internal mechanism to decide whether the democratically elected mayor is superior or inferior to the democratically elected strategic authority. We have to know who is in charge. If they are both in charge, the confusion will be significantly worse than any portrayal of the present situation.

We must then ask of what the authority and the mayor are in charge. The Minister made a slip at the beginning of his speech that I forbore to mention. He said that no other capital city in Europe—he may have meant the world but I think that he meant western Europe—lacked a strategic authority. Paris does not have one.

Mr. Raynsford: Citywide.

Mr. Gummer: Paris's authority is not citywide. Its mayor does not control Paris; he controls the central area. It was for the Government to say whether London would consist of the area displayed on the map that the Minister vainly tried to show us. The example of Paris shows that a city can have an effective voice without having the same sort of coverage. The Minister has shown that that voice was loud enough for him to believe that the strategic authority covered the whole of Paris. He has obviously thought that for a long time, but it is not true.

It is difficult to see how to provide for the strategic needs of London in the narrow way suggested by Labour. That is why I ask over what are the strategic authority and mayor supposed to preside. Let us take transport. What sort of strategic policy for transport in London can possibly be contained within the boundaries of the old GLC area? Conservative Members, and many Government Members, know that transport in London means dealing with an area stretching from Margate to St. Albans. It can be done no other way. That is why London's transport strategy must cover an area much wider than that of the GLC.

On the other hand, in dealing with the Thames, one would not want the London borough of Ealing to be centrally involved. One has to be able to reach beyond the GLC area upstream and below it downstream. That is why the strategic authority argument does not work. Each policy matter demands a different geography for an effective strategy.

That is why the Minister cannot avoid the question of what area constitutes London. It is no good saying that he will leave that for the future. If this is really a radical policy, and the Minister has a list of fresh, new-minted policies for easy reference, why does not he face up to the question that lies behind all of this? How can we have a strategic authority over an area that manifestly differs as between different services and that is much larger for many things than the old GLC area and much smaller for many others?

For example, the Minister mentioned a strategy for the theatre. That would largely, if not entirely, involve the four central London boroughs of Westminster, Camden, Lambeth and Southwark. The strategic needs are represented by an association of those boroughs; but dealing effectively with the Thames involves a different strategic area. The Minister must face up to some of those issues.

Having shown the Minister that his strategy does not work for transport, let us consider air pollution. He bravely said that air pollution knows no borough boundaries. It does not; but does he think that it does not cross from Bexley into Dartford? What sort of concept is that? Half the air pollution in London comes from the north of the continent: it blows over from the rest of Europe. Is that to be part of London's strategic policy? The hon. Gentleman would have a London authority with a foreign policy on air pollution. We would go to the GLC and its nuclear-free zone notices.

The hon. Gentleman cannot defend his case for air pollution policies in London on the basis that the problem is wider than the boroughs. Of course it is wider than the boroughs, but the area that he proposes would be no better at dealing with air pollution than the areas that now do so. In fact, it would be much worse.

Mr. Merchant *rose—*

Ms Hodge: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: In a moment.

Major air pollution strategies must be carried out within the European Union rather than nationally, because pollution is blown over from Europe, and, as a contributory cause, we blow 50 per cent. of our pollution over there. There must be an overall policy on the quality of motor cars and the terms under which they may be sold. That must be done on a wider basis, but there must be a national strategy for air pollution. The previous Government were the first Government in this country to have one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but he has an awful habit of turning his back to the Chair.

Mr. Gummer: I thought that I had remembered, but I have not. I am sorry.

The next level is the national level, but, below that, the local level is important. That is where particular measures can be introduced for particular transport difficulties. The

hon. Gentleman proposes that that should be not a local decision, but a Londonwide decision. What we will get is what we had with the GLC. We will have a strategic authority deciding generally and implementing locally. There will be the usual rows between the strategic authority and the local council, when it should be the local council that decides on local measures to deal with the local problem of air pollution.

Mr. Merchant: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the strength of his argument and the absurdity of the Labour party's position is borne out by the contradiction in its policy document "A Voice for London"? It says:

"The harmful gases and particles which are damaging people's health recognise no local government boundaries."

In the very next sentence, it says:

"They and their harmful effects can only be countered by London-wide policies."

Is that not nonsense, and does not my right hon. Friend's argument prove it to be so?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right, and that was shown by the reversal in the order of things in the Under-Secretary's speech. He started with the solution, and assumed that the problems were resolved by that solution, instead of starting with the problems and asking what solution would bring help. If one starts with the problems of air pollution, one discovers that what is required is a Europewide policy covering motor car emissions, a national policy on air quality and local—and I mean local—policies to deal with local hot spots. A regional policy is not required, because that would provide no extra help and would merely create confusion.

Ms Hodge: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: I beg the hon. Lady's pardon. I promised to give way.

Ms Hodge: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I have listened to him carefully. For a number of years, he was the Minister for London. Sadly, the committee that he chaired and the work that he undertook were in secret. One presumes that, as Minister for London, he had some concept of his responsibilities in that role. What were they, and why is he having such difficulty defining the responsibilities that we want to devolve to the people of London in a democratic forum?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Lady kindly makes my point. I had responsibility for the Thames way outside the GLC area and right down to the sea. We had the first Thames strategy of any Government. The needs of London demanded a strategic control much wider and further than the old GLC area. We recognised that, for the purposes of the river, we had to consider the interests of London way beyond the old boundaries. The hon. Lady makes my case.

When I was Minister for London, to get the London borough of Camden to come to terms with the London borough of Westminster to provide the same parking arrangements in theatreland, I had to deal with two different boroughs together. That was a small area, and, perfectly reasonably, I did not have to cover the whole of London. When I dealt with transport, I had a Minister responsible for transport in London whose remit reached to Margate and up to St. Albans, because that was necessary.

The Government are not devolving to the assembly the strategic roles of the Minister for London and of the committee, which, far from meeting in secret, met with representatives from London and worked things out. The hon. Lady is not suggesting that those strategic powers be devolved to the assembly. She proposes that the assembly should have narrow powers to cover all matters in the London area as defined by the old GLC. The only part of the old GLC that the hon. Gentleman wants to retain is the area over which it ruled. He says that, in every other way, it will be a totally different, never been seen before, utterly new-minted authority. He knows that the old-minted authority was not acceptable to people in London.

The hon. Gentleman must seriously consider how the new authority will work. It cannot deal effectively with transport, air pollution or environmental protection. What additional environmental protection contribution is made by providing a strategic authority that can function only by telling local councils how they should operate? Environmental protection in every other area is handled either nationally or locally, which is a better way. Local circumstances can be very different. The London borough of Hounslow is nothing like the London borough of Brent. It is perfectly reasonable for the environmental problems of the locality to be dealt with locally.

The hon. Gentleman's argument does not hold water, unless he can explain to us where London is for the purposes of his strategic authority, and how he will deal with areas of policy that manifestly reach outside it. I use the example of the Thames. The GLC existed for a long time, but it never managed to have a strategic planning policy for the Thames. Everyone said that we could not do it, but we did. There is a strategic planning authority for the Thames: the boroughs must adhere to clear guidelines.

What will the future assembly do about a strategic policy, given that it will not cover the whole area? Labour Members will no doubt say that there will be partnerships between the boroughs above and below the river. Why will partnerships work in those circumstances and not when it comes to partnerships between the riverine boroughs in London? If partnership can deliver a strategic policy outside London, why not inside London?

The fact is that partnership has delivered a strategy inside London, and it works. It works because the boroughs are not frightened. There is the cross-river partnership of the four great central London boroughs. They work extremely well together, because they know that it is a partnership of equals, and that no one is in the background trying to take over their powers or tell them what to do. Why is Elmbridge prepared to work from outside the old GLC area with the boroughs inside? Because they all know that they can do so on the basis of an equal partnership.

The hon. Gentleman said that partnership was creative, that the Government were in favour of it and would build on it. One of the bits of Mr. Tony Travers's organogram refers to the complications of those necessary partnerships. If the hon. Gentleman means partnership, why must he have a bossy assembly to boss those partnerships around?

[Mr. Gummer]

Partnerships are about equality—about sharing and working. It is because of that equality that we in London have delivered, as the hon. Gentleman says, a capital city that outclasses all other capital cities—the hon. Gentleman said that we were at the top of the list—in western Europe and beyond. In fact, the hon. Gentleman has understated the case; Britain now has one of the two world-class capitals. We have achieved that without an assembly and without an elected mayor. One might suggest that one reason why we have achieved that is that the system of governance in London has brought the whole of London together—nobody is bossed about. The business community, voluntary organisations and the democratically elected local boroughs have made the achievement together.

What Government in the world would say, "We have the finest capital there is; we are vying only with one other city in the world, New York; we are doing extraordinarily well; after 18 years of Conservative government, we can say that London is doing better than anywhere else so we must have an assembly—our need is desperate"? That is nonsense. The hon. Gentleman has applied a solution to something that is not a problem. When we did have a problem, it was owing to the over-governance, not under-governance, of London.

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman is praying in aid the business community. Will he answer the following question? If his argument is correct, why has the London Chamber of Commerce confirmed that 75 per cent. of the business community regard the introduction of a strategic, elected authority for London as a good idea? Why does its chief executive go on to make the following point in a letter in today's *Financial Times*? The letter states:

"Since 1986, London has been alone among the great world cities in being governed not by a single strategic body but by a farrago of governmental and non-governmental organisations. This have often resulted in poor policy co-ordination and a distinct lack of transparency in decision-making"?

Mr. Gummer: First, I was praying in aid not the business community, but the facts—the facts as rehearsed by the hon. Gentleman. Secondly, I did not refer to the letter, because it is not true. New York, our biggest competitor, does not have a strategic authority. The mayor of New York does not cover the whole of that great city. It is not true and the hon. Gentleman should not read out to the House letters that would, if taken seriously, mislead it because the statements that they contain are not true. When we have something that is not broken, we should not try to fix it.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Did my right hon. Friend notice that, although the letter listed a number of points, at no point did it say that they were damaging business or the ability to create good business in London?

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is right, but I prefer to keep to the facts, which are that the Labour party admits that London is doing better than anywhere else, and doing so without a strategic authority or a mayor.

If the strategic authority cannot deal with transport and environmental pollution because there is no advantage to be had in doing so, will it do something about housing? We were told that homelessness was one reason why London had failed. Therefore, we assumed that the proposal would do something about homelessness. I must press the hon. Gentleman on that point. The Green Paper must state clearly what arrangements there are to be for the strategic authority to deal with homelessness.

I live in the London borough of Ealing. It is interesting that I was evidently not considered to be a suitable candidate as Minister for London even though I live in the London borough of Ealing and have lived in London for almost all my life—I know it quite well. One of the previous problems was that the GLC and the boroughs did not know who was responsible for housing. We now need to know whether homelessness will come within the authority's remit.

The hon. Gentleman also said that the authority would be responsible for strategic planning—no doubt it would cover matters such as waste. Far from finding it difficult to deal with strategic planning such as waste, almost all the London boroughs came together to make a joint capital challenge bid for a strategic waste policy. They could do so together, through partnership—the advantage being that the partnership was not merely between the various London boroughs, but between those boroughs, the voluntary organisations and the business community. That partnership was the better and stronger because it was not threatened by the over-reaching and over-mighty operation of a strategic authority.

The Under-Secretary purposely reversed the order of his speech. He has not presented the problems, because his solutions do not resolve them. He has not described exactly what London will comprise or the area that it will cover. He has not told us how the authority will deal with strategic matters that obviously fall outside the old GLC area or are limited to districts that are smaller than it was. He has not described the divisions between the powers of the mayor and the powers of the executive authority.

Importantly, the hon. Gentleman has not told us who will pay for the authority. He has not told us how much the slimmed authority will cost or how the people of London are to decide whether they want to pay for it. That is why we want to know about the referendum. Its first question must be: "Do you want a mayor?" Its second question must be: "Do you want a strategic authority?" Its third question must be: "Do you want both of them?" The fourth question must be: "Do you want to pay for that?" The parameters of, and taxation arrangements for, that payment must be made clear if people are to answer that question sensibly.

Accountability is not about adhering to a vague proposition, but about whether someone wants to pay for it. All of us will vote yes to something that sounds good and costs nothing. We want to know how much the authority will cost. Until we know that, no Londoner can make a proper decision. Those questions are essential. If the authority is to be democratically accountable, the hon. Gentleman must ask the people of London those questions and trust their answers.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there is a fifth question to be asked: "Do you want the authority to be fairly elected?"

Mr. Gummer: I know about the word "fairly" as used by the hon. Gentleman, but I shall not be tempted too far.

One of the most unfair systems of election that I know is proportional representation in Germany, where the smallest political party elected is permanently in government, however the majority is made up. I know that the Liberals are longing for proportional representation here, as they would then be represented in every Government instead of only in the present Government, whom they manifestly support most of the time.

Having presented the solution and then turned to the problem, the Under-Secretary has not only failed to connect the two, but has presented a solution that will make the problem worse—a fundamentally damaging action. He is pretending that the governance of London can be divorced from the dominance of London, but it cannot. London is so dominant a force within England and Britain that it reaches way beyond any possible boundaries for its local governance.

Therefore, whatever the new assembly decides and whatever the new mayor decides—even if, surprisingly, they both decide the same—if, for national reasons, the decision cannot be implemented, the Government will adopt the same characteristically tough, direct and undemocratic attitude towards those two bodies as they have towards the House of Commons. If the Government do not allow the House to debate referendum Bills properly, they will certainly not listen to any assembly or mayor on issues where they think that the assembly and the mayor have made decisions that are contrary to their view of the interests of the United Kingdom.

We must not kid ourselves—there are now to be three groups of people governing London. There will be the assembly and the mayor and the Government and the boroughs and—if the Liberals have their way—there will be lots of parish councils as well. London, from being the most successful, least over-governed capital in the world, will become a less successful, more over-governed capital.

Of course, all that will help with unemployment. I have no doubt that a lot of people will be employed to run the assembly and the mayor. The new bodies will probably be put in the middle of Hackney, in the hope that that will deal with unemployment there. There is nothing in the propositions before us that will reduce unemployment in London by one person other than those who are taken on by the assembly. The Minister has made no case for an overall strategic authority doing anything about unemployment.

When he was asked by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) about regional development, what did we hear? We heard the most remarkably imprecise, obscure and peculiar answer, which was designed not to upset the hon. Gentleman. We did not gather whether anything would happen before 2000—it would happen in parallel. Does that mean that there is to be another authority, another organisation, another part in the organogram? Is that what the Government are suggesting? Or is the new agency to be part of what is being set up? We need to know. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman understood the Minister's reply more clearly than I did.

Mr. Corbyn: Before he finishes, will the right hon. Gentleman explain why unemployment in London is so high after 18 years of Tory Governments, why the Tory Government opposed having a referendum on the future of London at the time of the GLC's abolition and, above all, why they did nothing to establish a serious economic development agency for London that could deal with chronic unemployment, which runs at 20 per cent. in my constituency? The point I put to the Minister was that I want the agency to be set up in advance of the establishment of a London authority, which would then take over its operation. The unemployed of London cannot wait much longer.

Mr. Gummer: That is a change of tune—the hon. Gentleman did not say that. My point is that there is no evidence whatsoever that such an agency will add to the number of people employed except by the number of people who are employed by it. I cannot understand how an agency dealing with the whole of London will do what is much more effectively done by the various partnerships that we already have, which deal with the reality in London. Unemployment in London is falling fast and, if the Government do not muck it up, it will go on falling fast. The truth is that it falls fast because of Government action and not because of some Londonwide agency.

The trouble with the Labour party is that, underneath all the flam, it is unreformed in the sense that it believes that Governments create jobs. Of course Labour Governments create jobs—they create jobs for the boys and girls who are employed by government. They do not create real jobs, and the problem with the proposal before us today is that it will increase the cost of London, decrease the attractiveness of London and drive people away rather than bring them in.

Coverage will be totally unsatisfactory because of the nature of London. The strategic authority will argue with the strategic mayor and both will argue with the Government. It is a recipe for confusion and distortion, and the truth is that the Minister does not even know now what he will propose in this respect, because he has not faced up to any of the real issues relating to the governance of our great capital city.

10.53 am

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) did the House and the issue before us a great disservice by talking at such length with so little substance and a constant stream of points made simply to confuse.

There are points of weakness in the Government's proposals—it would be bizarre if, at this early stage, there were not—and we should concentrate on those. However, the only points of substance we heard from the shadow spokesperson were complaints about the Greater London council, which was set up by the Macmillan Government. Weaknesses were built into that council. If we go back and look at the Herbert commission report, we see that it was a good document, which said that the London authority should be a strategic one and should not overlap with the boroughs.

However, because the Macmillan Government did not want to create a powerful voice for London, they ended up creating a much smaller authority with a multitude of local powers and so set in train 30 years of duplication with the London boroughs. The right hon. Gentleman complains that the GLC never tackled the Thames. Of course we did not; we were not the authority for the Thames—there was a Thames water authority and a Port

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

of London authority. It was the failure to give the GLC real strategic powers when it was set up in 1964 that caused so many problems later. We do not need to be blamed now for the legacy of the Macmillan Government. We want to make sure that we now create a proper strategic authority.

I know that there is to be a business statement at 11 o'clock, so I shall not talk for too long, as many hon. Members want to make their maiden speeches. I have therefore decided to shorten my speech by deleting all the points on which I would have complimented my hon. Friend the Minister and agreed with him. I shall instead focus on the points where giving him a little comradely advice on the weak spots may help.

There is no problem with the area to be covered—as one flies into London, one can see that it is a clearly defined urban area. There is only one point at which the boundary could be varied in any meaningful way and that is at the border between south-west London and Surrey, which was changed by the Macmillan Government so as to exclude large areas from the GLC's coverage. However, there is no point in having a long-drawn-out row with Surrey in an effort to take chunks of it, and unless there is overwhelming demand from the people of Surrey to become part of the new and wonderful authority that we are setting up, we should accept the area of the 32 London boroughs as the obvious area.

I also agree with the range of functions. The only addition that I would make at this stage would be the major arts functions of London—the South Bank Arts Board, and so on. Those could well be brought under the sway of the new authority so that there was democratic accountability in that area.

I know that the question of a mayor or council will be dominant, but the real issue is revenue-raising powers. The Treasury has always feared London having any financial independence whatsoever. That is why the GLC, alone of every local authority in Britain, had to get a separate Act of Parliament every year for its capital programme. There was a long-standing reluctance in the Treasury to allow the old GLC any independence, so we were bound hand and foot, our capital programme determined every year by central Government.

Usually, we were right and the central Government wrong. Tory and Labour GLCs in the early 1970s asked for permission to build the Jubilee line out to docklands. My own administration repeated that request in the early 1980s. The Treasury first persuaded Jim Callaghan's Labour Government to block it and then persuaded Mrs. Thatcher's Tory Government to block it. If we had been allowed to get ahead and build the Jubilee line extension, it would have been operating these past 10 years and we would have been in a much stronger position to create a more vibrant and economically dynamic community in the new docklands development.

I hope that, if we give Londoners the right to elect a mayor and council, the new authority will be answerable for its financial policies to the city and the people of London, not to the Treasury. That means that the new authority must have revenue-raising powers. At the very least, it must have effective control over existing precepts set by unelected bureaucrats on the quangos. There is no reason why the new authority should not have a degree of financial independence so that it can respond to the problems of London.

The key question is that of the mayor and the local authority. My first worry is that city mayors in America are the main focus of corruption in American public life. Organised crime, especially the mafia, has sought influence in mayoral chambers because a single individual has all the powers to award contracts and appoint to jobs. How reassured would the people of London have felt if, instead of being the leader of the GLC with 91 other members watching me like hawks, I had been running the show all on my own—awarding all those contracts and jobs on my own? No one would have been terribly happy with that.

The strength of a party system is that people watch those in office. I often felt that the Labour members on that authority were watching me harder than were the Tory members, but that was a strength. As an Americanism in this proposal, the idea that we can elect an individual who can save us—one person in which we vest all powers—is a move away from the idea of parties, which have ideologies and principles.

Strong arguments would be needed to persuade me that we should move away from the idea of an elected authority with a leader. We are told that if we have an elected mayor there will be more public attention, although I could hardly have got much more attention as leader of the GLC. Some people worry that people may not notice the new structure, but if one has the right policies and pursues them, they will command attention, with all the publicity necessary.

There is a problem concerning conflict between an elected authority and a mayor. In America, the system works by back scratching.

It being Eleven o'clock, MADAM SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Standing Order No. 11 (Friday sittings).*

Business of the House

11 am

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a short business statement about the business for next week.

On Tuesday 10 June, there will now be the completion of consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the Education (Schools) Bill. The business previously announced for that day will be taken the following week. The business for the remainder of next week will be as previously announced.

Mr. Alastair Goodlad (Eddisbury): I thank the Leader of the House for the statement and express my sympathy to her for being forced to come down to the House this morning to make it.

Does the right hon. Lady accept that, last night, the Government sought to ram through in haste an important piece of legislation, which will have a significant effect on the future of this country and many of its children? Does she accept that their attempts to do so were badly planned, badly managed and badly executed; that they cast aside the spirit of the Jopling reforms as though they did not exist, and sought to frogmarch their Lobby fodder and their legislation through the House late on a Thursday evening? Does she accept that they failed, and that the House, with short speeches, without filibustering, debated the legislation—or the Opposition did, while the Lobby fodder glumly watched, silently drawing their emoluments and perquisites?

Does the right hon. Lady accept that she must be the only person in the House who was surprised? It was always an improper and impractical proposition to try to complete that complicated Committee stage in one day, and an arrogant nonsense to believe that proper, well-thought-out, well-considered legislation could have been the result of such hurried scrutiny.

Does the right hon. Lady accept that, yet again, after abolishing the twice-weekly Prime Minister's Question Time, contrary to the unanimous recommendations of the Procedure Committee, and after guillotining the Committee stage of the referendums Bill before it had even started, leaving wide areas undebated by the House, the Government have demonstrated their characteristic contempt for the House—another display of Government arrogance accompanied by inefficiency and incompetence?

Does the right hon. Lady accept that business management is completely out of hand and that she, as Leader of the House, together with those unelected political appointees running the Government, whose puppet she is, and whose contempt for Parliament is equalled only by their ignorance of its workings, will need to learn from this experience?

Mrs. Taylor: This week, I have been called a puppet by the right hon. Gentleman, and a bully boy, which I am not sure about, by one of his right hon. Friends. The Opposition should get their line straight and be a bit more consistent.

The right hon. Gentleman offered his sympathies for the fact that I have been forced to be at the Dispatch Box this morning. I think that some of us would have been prepared to be here all night and this morning; the reason we are not is that we got a better offer. If the Opposition come to us and offer to complete the Bill by next Tuesday evening, which they did, that is fine as far as the Government are concerned, because we believe that it is right that this important legislation is passed.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that it was the Opposition who voted against suspension of the 10 o'clock rule and therefore I think that it was the Opposition who were not keen on continuing the debate last night. The one point on which I agree with the right hon. Gentleman is that this is an important Bill. As was said last night, it will help thousands of children throughout Britain. It is important, therefore, that the Government press ahead with this legislation.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): While it is fascinating to watch the small ranks of Tory Members defending privilege in our society, will my right hon. Friend give us an assurance that the spectacle will be over by 10 o'clock on Tuesday evening, in the spirit of the Jopling reforms, so that we may conclude consideration of that important piece of legislation by then?

Mrs. Taylor: We have had an assurance that that will be the case; that was the basis on which agreement was reached in the early hours of this morning.

Mr. Goodlad: On a point of fact, Madam Speaker, it was the Government who approached us in the early hours of this morning, not the reverse.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): However the result came about, Liberal Democrat Members welcome the business statement. It is a practical and sensible way to proceed, and the more often the House can avoid sitting into the middle of the night for any purpose, the better.

Mrs. Taylor: I agree entirely with what the hon. Gentleman says.

There are two ways in which we can operate under the present rules of the House. One is to reach voluntary, sensible and practical agreements such as the hon. Gentleman suggests. At other times, if that is impossible—if there is no co-operation—the Government must resort to such measures as the guillotine, as was done in the case of the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill, which we discussed this week.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is it not worth putting on the record the fact that, last night, contrary to the ideas that have been floated by the Opposition Chief Whip and shadow Leader of the House, the Labour Government did not take the Bill into a Standing Committee, although they could have done? The Bill could have been upstairs for two days, two nights—who knows?—and could have been completed, but it was decided to debate it on the Floor of the House and give everyone a chance.

As the Bill could have been guillotined and was not, all this talk about bullying and pushing it through in an unconstitutional manner is uncalled for.

Late last night, contrary to the views of the shadow Leader of the House, who, incidentally, was not voting at the end for some obscure reason, he managed to get a

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

voting threshold of about 29 at a quarter to 2 or thereabouts—not 164, the number entitled to vote in the Conservative leadership election, but 29. He should be satisfied with what has taken place. Next time, if it is left to me and I am asked my advice, the Bill will go upstairs, or it will be guillotined, and then the right hon. Gentleman might have something to squeal about.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend is right to point out the choices that were presented to us. He is also right to point out that there was not a great deal of interest and that the number of Opposition Members who were voting late on was as low as 29. The Bill could have been guillotined. We could have had a combined guillotine motion on Tuesday on the Education (Schools) Bill and the referendums Bill, but we decided to allow the Opposition to make representations. They could not reach agreement before, and we are happy, as long as the Bill makes progress on Tuesday, which it will.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Following the helpful intervention by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), does the right hon. Lady accept that this is evidence yet again of a combination of arrogance and misjudgment of the type to which we have had to become rather used, even at this early stage of this Parliament? The Bill should have been taken in Committee in the usual way, so that it would have received proper scrutiny.

I say to the Leader of the House, because she recently gave us a lecture on the need for proper legislative scrutiny, that, if she had been in the Chamber last night, she would have seen the spectacle of her Back Benchers making no contribution to the scrutiny of the Bill, and her colleagues, the Minister for School Standards and the Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), making the most derisory, inadequate responses to the very important questions that were raised by my right hon. and hon. Friends during the debate.

Will the right hon. Lady learn a lesson and try to ensure that future Bills are given proper scrutiny, mainly in Committee upstairs, and learn from the fact that she has had to come back today to give the House a further opportunity properly to scrutinise the Bill?

Mrs. Taylor: The only arrogance and misjudgment that I saw last night was when the right hon. Gentleman chose to address the House for about 30 minutes when everyone else was wrapped up and going home, because they realised that a deal had been done and they did not find the right hon. Gentleman's speech interesting enough to detain them.

Last night, we also saw Ministers making mincemeat of Opposition spokesmen, who were here to defend privilege and who were unable to explain why, when in government, they had not adopted the measures with respect to siblings that they were advocating last night. The Conservative party clearly showed that it has no regard for the problems being faced in schools, where thousands of young children are being taught in classes of more than 30.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Will the right hon. Lady reconsider what she has said about the time that will be available for debate next week? I know that she believes that she has a deal with our Whips. I wanted to speak in some of last night's debates, but was not called, because each time, before I had a chance to make a speech about my constituents' concerns about class sizes—the right hon. Lady keeps mentioning them—the closure was moved.

We need more time to discuss the matter. Would it be in order to table amendments that would include in the Bill a guarantee of reduced class sizes? Despite what the BBC said this morning, to the effect that the Bill is about reducing class sizes, it appears to be almost out of order to discuss reducing class sizes in debates on the Bill, because not a word in it would in fact reduce them.

Mrs. Taylor: If the hon. Gentleman did not get called last night, that is not a matter for me; and if he is worried about the timing next Tuesday, that is a matter between him and his Whips. Details of the timing of debates for Tuesday will be discussed in the usual channels. If the hon. Gentleman has a problem, he should talk to his Whips.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Is not the point, though, that this all stems from the original high-handed slapping of a guillotine on the constitutional measure to do with referendums earlier in the week? If that timetable had not been put in place, or if it had been less severe, the many people who wanted to speak but who did not get a chance to in the later stages would have been able to do so.

Will the right hon. Lady undertake to settle the matter by agreeing that, when other legislation such as the devolution Bills comes before the House, it will not be timetabled—or at least not timetabled in such a ludicrously strict way? That would enable others to speak in the debates.

Mrs. Taylor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his forthright honesty—for letting us know what was really going on last night. He has let the cat out of the bag. Last night was nothing to do with the Opposition's attitude to the Education (Schools) Bill; it was retaliation for our success with the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill.

Governance of London

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

11.12 am

Mr. Livingstone: Before I was interrupted, I was dealing with the relationship between the mayor and a small elected strategic authority. I am not sure that such an authority would be a sufficient check on any possible abuse of power or corruption by the mayor. In the United States of America, there tends to be a lot of wheeler-dealing between the mayor and the city council, which may comprise only a dozen or 20 members. Trade-offs and deals are done as everyone proceeds cosily in their usual ways of working.

I should much prefer the more vigorous approach which is a tradition of our political system: a party leadership held to account by its own party members every bit as much as by opposition members.

I had the impression when I intervened earlier that there were some not wholly supportive rumblings on my own side, so I wish to refer to the disease of manifestoitis. We are told that something is in the manifesto so it must be banged through. I draw attention to what happened in 1983, when the Tory manifesto included a one-line reference to abolishing the GLC—even though the former Secretary of State for the Environment, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), had recommended against and the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), was opposed as well.

The only member of the Cabinet at the time who was in favour was Lord Tebbit. But Mrs. Thatcher rammed abolition through, whereupon the House wasted two years of its life abolishing the Greater London Council, to general consternation.

Everyone said, of course, that the move had been in the manifesto, but that is not to say that there was not something wrong with it. It remains our job to scrutinise issues, even if they have been mentioned in the manifesto. I remember a GLC pamphlet that we issued that resulted from a private meeting of Tory Members of Parliament with Willie Whitelaw, who said, discussing the mess that the Government had got into over abolishing the GLC, "How do we get out of this mess without appearing disloyal?"

If we are honest, my party knows that there is no overwhelming support for a separately elected mayor in the London Labour party, among London Labour borough council leaders, or among Labour Members. We know that the Prime Minister is enthusiastic about the idea and that he genuinely believes in it. Massive pressure was brought to bear on Labour borough leaders to go along with the idea and not to rock the boat or appear disloyal. So we all went along with it; we did not make a fuss; it was what the leader wanted. But we must get it right: the leader may be wrong. After real thought and real consultation with Londoners, we may decide not to proceed with it.

Every opinion poll has shown overwhelming support for an elected authority, but opinion polls on whether we should have a mayor have varied. The issue still needs to be argued through. If Londoners ultimately vote for a mayor, that will be the end of the matter—but it is not yet a foregone conclusion. Londoners will want to know how to guard against corruption by such a powerful official. The American example will weigh heavily with many people. Nor do we want a continual state of warfare between a mayor and an elected authority.

I detect here a touch of what I like to call the Millbank tendency. Some of our friends in the Millbank tower have not been in the Labour party machine for quite as long as some of the rest of us and are not as steeped in the culture of the Labour party and its politics. They may even not feel quite as engaged with Labour's trade union traditions as others of us do. They may want a mayor to be above party politics—above the fray. That is why I want the Minister to tell us something about the ideological principles underpinning all this.

If we make the case for a directly elected mayor, why not have a directly elected Prime Minister? He would be above the party fray, able to wheel and deal. I cannot see why the principle should apply to local government but not to national politics. I always feel that some of the more recent members of the Labour party almost wish they had been born in America, with its presidents and mayors, its pomp and its glamour. They are not too happy about being restricted by the ideology, principles and traditions of their own political party and background.

We need to think seriously before breaking with the political traditions and culture of this country and importing a foreign method of government of which we have no understanding or experience.

Not everyone in my party has doubts about a mayor. My good and hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) has been loud in his support of the idea, and is loudly making it clear that he wants to stand for the position.

I followed my hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms Hodge) into a radio studio the other day where she had just been saying that the mayor would occupy the second most powerful position in the land—she may not have been including the monarchy. Hence, she said, the mayor should be remunerated accordingly and paid much more than a Member of Parliament.

When I was on the GLC, we earned £5,000 or £6,000 a year—we did the job because we wished to serve London and make it a better place. I have grave doubts about creating a position with so much attendant pomp, publicity and salary. Londoners will be left confused about where responsibility lies. I urge the Government to get it right. Londoners must not feel pushed into a corner, unable to make the choices that they want. They must not be presented with a fait accompli—a take it or leave it referendum. They are bright enough to make their own choices.

I know that London is not flavour of the month with all the other parts of the United Kingdom, but we can make up our own minds about what sort of government we want. We need a multiple choice referendum: do Londoners want a mayor and an elected authority? Do they simply want an elected authority without a mayor? Do they want it to have revenue-raising powers? Do they want—I offer this in a cross-party spirit—proportional representation? I would see no objection to that. *[Interruption.]* I thought that that would lose me some of my Campaign group friends. If there is no consensus, the authority will not survive a change of Government 10 or 15 years down the road. It must be voted for by Londoners, and Londoners must agree to make that choice.

[Mr. Livingstone]

The key issue is the revenue, although we will be obsessed by the issue of the mayor. If the Treasury remains in control, the government that we create for London will have no more independence than the Vichy regime in France under the Nazis. I am not equating the Treasury with the Nazis, even if I have some complaints about it. With the Treasury in control, the mayor would have no more authority than Marshal Pétain, which is not what we want.

Londoners must have the right to vote for people who will do things that the Treasury does not want and things that upset the Government of the day. When we had a Tory authority, it upset a Labour Government. When we had a Labour authority at county hall, it upset the Tory Government. We all forget, however, that we had Labour authorities that upset the Labour leadership, and Tory authorities that upset the Tory Government of the day.

11.20 am

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): The Under–Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford), is a civilised man. As I recognise that this is not the last debate that we shall have on the subject, that is a great relief. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) was an admirable foil to him, and for the same reason I hope that my right hon. Friend retains his present responsibilities.

The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) is a most engaging hon. Member and he will know, I think, that it is a genuine expression on my part when I say that it is a privilege to serve as a fellow inner-city Member with him in the House. I thought that I detected in his speech the not too distant rumble of thunder.

I have not recently read Michael Innes's book, "Operation Pax", but my recollection is that it starts with a man going into a shop in London, uttering a familiar phrase and suddenly finding himself catapulted, as James Bond once was in Harlem, into an underground cavern. The sentence that he uttered was Dr. Johnson's phrase:

"When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life".

The man who went into the shop had not realised that that was a significant password.

Apart from evacuation, much of my education, the army and abroad, I have been a Londoner all my life. I had 18 years in business in Mayfair, meeting a payroll for Londoners every month for those 18 years, and since then I have had 18 years as a full-time Member of Parliament. My family have been Londoners since my grandfather came down from Birkenhead in the 1880s. My father was a London Member of Parliament for 23 years. He served on the old Hampstead borough council for 19 years. My noble mother, who is still with us, served on the Hampstead borough council for 17 years, and my father led the Tory party on the old London county council for seven years after the war.

My own contribution to what is called the governance of London is rather more modest. I spent 18 months on the London borough of Camden, but I have frequently thought that 18 months on the London borough of Camden is worth 18 years on a number of other authorities. In 1957, when my father held the responsibilities that my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal previously held, he was responsible for setting up the Herbert commission, to which the hon. Member for Brent, East paid compliments.

I went on the London borough of Camden in 1968. That was the year when the Tory party took Hackney and the Labour party in Islington was wiped out. It was the only year in which we took power in Camden.

The grandfather of the Minister without Portfolio, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), succeeded in winning the LCC in 1934. That was interrupted for the only time in 30 years in 1949, when the Tory party effectively won the election for the LCC, although the Labour party, by what I would neutrally describe as a pre-Nolan stratagem, retained power. My mother won a by-election in Kilburn in 1948 and held it at the council elections in 1949. She is the last Tory councillor to sit for Kilburn.

Perhaps even more significant, after the great landslide in 1906, the Liberal party, which had held the LCC since 1898, was swept out of power in 1907.

Although of course I acknowledge the substance of what we are debating today, it brings a smile to the face of some of us that, considering this background of national landslides being succeeded by London landslides in the opposite direction, it is conceivable that one part of the policy and strategy of the present Government is to change the playing field in advance of that other landslide taking place.

Governance is a 17th-century word, appropriate to our present puritan masters. I mentioned in the debate on the Queen's Speech on 16 May, about which the Under–Secretary of State was kind enough to send me a note, that in the 120 hours of canvassing that I did on the doorsteps of the Cities of London and Westminster, not one elector raised with me the need for a strategic authority in London. I do not make too much of that, but that absence was notable when we read about the tremendous enthusiasm. I recognise, of course, that discussion of the matter sells newspapers, and I am not in the least surprised that the campaign has been led by the media.

In light of what the hon. Member for Brent, East said about the Prime Minister's views about the mayor, I fear that we may be going in the same direction as we have sometimes gone in Europe—our leaders tell us what we need, but they are not necessarily supported by the generality in the country. There is a quotation from C. S. Lewis to the effect that, when one hears about somebody going around doing good to others, one can always tell the others by their hunted look. That, too, is in line with the puritan strand in the present Administration.

Of course I acknowledge that there was a differential swing against the Conservative party in London. There may be a number of reasons for it, including the fact that the swing against the Labour party in the late 1970s and 1980s had also been differentially high. Conservative Members who represent London seats must have a decent humility in these matters in the light of the defeat that we suffered, but it is also right for us to be decently wary about what the Labour party is proposing.

Where are we? The House will recall the moment reported by T. S. Eliot when he got into a cab in my constituency and the taxi driver looked over his shoulder and said, "You're Mr. Eliot, aren't you?" T. S. Eliot confirmed that he was. The taxi driver said, "I had that Bertrand Russell in the back of my cab only a fortnight ago, and I said to him over my shoulder, as I am saying to you now, 'What's it all about, then?' and do you know, he couldn't tell me."

My right hon. Friend alluded to the opaqueness of the Government's proposals. When Senator Vandenberg was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he came on his first visit to Europe at the time of the formation of NATO. He arrived at Le Bourget, which is where one arrived if one was flying into Paris from abroad. The entire French press who were gathered at the bottom of the companionway asked him to say a sentence in French. It was a language of which he was imperfectly the master. His mind went entirely blank, but there suddenly came back into it a single sentence from his school days, and he said in impeccable French, which I shall not quote because of the rules of the House, that there had been no great men since Mirabeau. For the next three days the entire French press sought to unravel that statement and discover its significance for contemporary French politics.

The ambiguity of the Government's position, which was not much reduced by the Minister's speech, I had charitably attributed to tensions within the London Labour party, which the hon. Member for Brent, East acknowledged. In what has happened so far, there is a whiff of the remark that used to be made about Denis Compton: that if he called you for a run, it was not an instruction, but the opening of negotiations. One senses that that has been going on in the London Labour party. Moreover, if one does not know where one is trying to get to, any road will get one there.

As this is a day for candour, I acknowledge what the Minister and the hon. Member for Brent, East said about the preparations for the abolition of the GLC in the 1983 Conservative manifesto. I remember it with particular clarity. As I did not know what the Conservative manifesto was going to say, and as I was a London Member and had to write my election address before I knew what it was going to say, I too had to resort to a certain ambiguity about our intentions.

There is universal agreement, even on the Government Front Bench, that we are not seeking a renewal of the GLC. The epitaph that I would choose for the GLC is reflected in the perception that, when the GLC was in existence, if one wanted to move a single parking meter, to add one or remove one, it would take nine months of correspondence between the local authority and the GLC to achieve that objective.

I do not want to give the impression that we are in the state of east Berlin prior to the fall of the wall, but there is a pleasant echo in a 1980s joke about the Stasi when the wall came down. When that event took place, there was no work for former Stasi members, so they all became taxi drivers. Indeed, they became the best taxi drivers in the world: all one had to do was to give one's name and they automatically knew one's address.

After 1986, power was transferred to the boroughs and it was welcomed by them. One of the few leper squints of pre-election Labour thinking on the governance of London appeared in an article in *The Times* of 14 March, which included the following memorable sentence—de haut en bas, and I apologise for breaking my own rule—

"Since boroughs appear to be carrying out their tasks adequately at present they will carry on with them."

The author of that remark is a member of the present Administration. I do not believe that any hereditary peer or peeress would ever have uttered quite such patronising words as fell from the pen of that life Member of the other place.

What none of Labour's preparatory language has contained is a detailed rebuttal of the legendary article that appeared in *The Economist* in August 1994, which stated that the way that London is currently being governed is the way in which great cities will be governed in the next century, while acknowledging that transport is a citywide issue.

There are witnesses in the other place, and from parties other than my own. At the macro level, ask Lord Tope, who has considerable London experience, of his views on the Abercrombie plan's effect on London's industrial and employment base. At the micro level, ask Lord Stallard about the destruction of a thriving piano manufacturing industry in Camden Town because of the Greater London council's transport policies.

London is ultimately a series of villages. We have never been subject to a Baron Hausmann regimenting us. We have a strong sense of locality, reminiscent of the Scottish soldier in a military hospital in Mesopotamia in 1916. He was interviewed in his bed by a visiting general, who asked him where he had been wounded. The soldier replied that he been wounded three miles the Ardnamurchan side of Baghdad. That same sense of locality prevails for Londoners as well. In the history of Bart's, my favourite index entry is:

"English civil war, effect on the parish."

If for Kipling east was east and west was west, for Londoners north is north and south is south. There is an engaging mutual ignorance of the other side of the river. When Arthur Wellard was playing in a pre-war match at the Scarborough festival and hit a ball into the small piazza outside the Scarborough ground called Trafalgar square, it was reported on the six o'clock news. Someone rushed into Mrs. Wellard's home down in Somerset and said, "Did you hear, dear, Arthur has just hit a ball into Trafalgar square?" Whereupon Mrs. Wellard said, "Fancy that, I wonder whether he was playing at Lords or the Oval."

To apply this village sense to one of London's industries, tourism, can be exemplified by the American couple passing through Parliament square, where one or the other asked what the Houses of Parliament were. The other replied, "It is either Oxford or Cambridge, but I'm not sure which."

I choose tourism because it comes into the category of the objectives of the strategic authority in terms of transport, planning and employment. Some "villages" have been profoundly successfully in encouraging leisure industries. To an extent, however—I am thinking particularly of Soho and Covent Garden in my constituency—it has become entirely counter-productive from the point of view of everyone who lives in the area. The best solution is to encourage alternative centres, notably on the south bank, where entrepreneurial activity and cultural ambitions, funded by the lottery, are proving

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

extremely successful in encouraging alternative centres. I have a genuine fear that a strategic authority, instead of accelerating that process, would slow it down. I say that for the purpose of the debate.

The Minister referred to business correspondence, and business has played a notable part in London's flowering over the past five years, in easy partnership with local authorities. It is the appeal of business that it should be consulted in anything that is done. I have not seen much reference—this is relevant to the sentences which the Minister read out—in the current artillery barrage to the schisms in the 1970s, which were the heydays of the Greater London council, between the interests of large business and of small, which are extremely difficult to serve equally in any sort of strategic thinking.

The mayor is a late joker, as the hon. Member for Brent, East implied. I realise, however, that the idea of a mayor has plenty of enthusiastic supporters. I am conscious, of course, of being guilty of the British capacity for thinking of reasons for not doing something. I am, however, a Conservative and I regard our history as informing us for the future. Sam Raeburn, the great Speaker of the House of Representatives, said that the three wisest words in the English language were, "Wait a minute." I share the view of the hon. Member for Brent, East that the history of the mayor needs considerable unravelling.

Roy Porter's distinguished social history is to the effect that we are a city in decline and that we need a strategic authority to cure it. I take a less pessimistic view. My second son, who was 30 this week, works in the media in the northern part of my constituency. He says that he cannot walk down a street in the heart of London without seeing change since he walked down it last because of the entrepreneurial activity that is taking place.

When Roy Porter gave his Carlton lecture on London, I asked him for his views on the impact of new technology in London in the next century. He said that he was not qualified to answer the question. For myself, I think that London can face the millennium with confidence and, unexpectedly for the Labour party perhaps, would add the effect of the energy of a new wave of refugees to that of new technology, which I believe will have a powerful beneficial effect on London. I do not know what new Labour will do for London, for the jury on it is still out.

I end on a constituency note. I took a decision in the middle of the previous Parliament to fight the general election when many of my colleagues, younger than myself, were deciding not to stand. A profound influence on me in making that decision was the possibility that there might be a Labour Government, and apprehension that they might wish to interfere with the arrangements for the City of London.

Those apprehensions have now dissipated but I hope that the new Government's plans will adequately harness the capacity and contribution for good of the City Corporation and the Lord Mayor. That capacity for good goes back over many centuries. The City civic and the City financial are a vivid instance of a successful partnership between business and government, to the good of London as a whole and to the good of the nation at large. I hope that that contribution can be maintained in whatever arrangements for the governance of London the Government see fit to put in front of us.

11.37 am

Mr. Keith Hill (Streatham): It seems that we have heard the resignation speech of the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke). The Labour party is raring to go to meet the challenge of the by-election.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his appointment as, among other things, the Minister for London. He made an outstanding speech that combined vision and intellectual rigour. The Government have a crystal-clear commitment to return democracy to London and have made an immediate start on that process. That is warmly welcomed by the vast majority of Londoners who, I have no doubt, will give overwhelming backing to the proposals that will lie behind the referendum next year.

The speech of my hon. Friend the Minister stood in marked contrast to the feeble response from the Opposition Front Bench, which was characterised by windy rhetoric and petty point-scoring, which I suspect will be the style of the Conservative Opposition for a long time to come.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) even made a half-hearted attempt to revive the issue of the so-called London tax. There will be no extra taxation, local or national, as a result of the new strategic authority for London. The new authority will take over existing agencies—the police, London Transport, the Government office for London and, perhaps, the emergency services—all of which are already funded and for which no extra spending will be required.

On the contrary, as the all-party Association of London Government has convincingly demonstrated in its report "Reaping the Rewards of Democracy", ending the duplication of back-up services and streamlining the new strategic authority offers the prospect of real savings for the taxpayer, not extra costs.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman must be somewhat confused if he presumes that the new authority will take over the strategic role for the police and the fire and civil defence authority, because both are currently precepting authorities. Therefore, by definition, without any other change, the new authority must be able to raise taxes on Londoners.

Mr. Hill: There is no intrinsic necessity for extra taxation, local or national, under the proposed arrangements.

It is a mark of their desperation that the Tories are still running with the idea of a so-called London tax. They tried that on before the general election and they got their answer then—a Tory rump of 11 Members out of the capital's 74 parliamentary seats and the return of 57 Labour Members, the biggest swing to Labour in the country.

The Tories will persist with windy rhetoric and point scoring because they have no positive alternative to suggest. The Conservative party can argue neither from principle nor practical experience to justify its opposition to the restoration of democratic government in London.

The truth is that it is a scandal that London should be the only capital city in the advanced industrial world without its own elected authority. It is the only major city

in the advanced industrial world without a form of democratic government. Indeed, it is the only city in Britain without a democratic authority. That is an affront to the democratic rights of Londoners and their reasonable expectation of participating in the decisions that affect their lives.

Let us remember that the case for an elected authority does not rest solely on democratic rights, but on the need for efficiency. People want democratic government because they know that democracy delivers better than non-democratic systems of government.

It is the condition of London that offers the biggest condemnation of the Tories' abolition of democracy from our city. I am delighted, of course, that London has apparently regained its status as the world's most swinging city. I am delighted that millions of tourists want to come here each year to enjoy the attractions of the centre of London. Our success in tourism is vital to the London economy.

However, London does not feel quite as good to the vast majority of Londoners living outside the golden city centre. For most Londoners, their experiences of the city are of rising crime, congestion, pollution, a crumbling public transport system, poor housing and high levels of unemployment. Survey after survey reveals that most Londoners do not like living here and would prefer to live elsewhere.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): To return to the question of taxation, I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has read the Labour party policy document, "A Voice For London". It refers to

"an authority with limited spending and tax-raising powers."

Is there not some sort of conflict between his ideas and those put forward in the document written by his colleagues on the Front Bench?

Mr. Hill: No, not at all. The new authority will assume the role of agencies that already have precisely those powers. There is nothing implicit in the proposals that would entail any increase in expenditure or taxation. The hon. Gentleman should be more relaxed about the matter, because Londoners have certainly not fallen for that scaremongering tactic.

London needs to be better administered so that it is more responsive to the wishes of Londoners. The interests of London need to be better represented to the Government and to the world. It is precisely because we recognised that that we justified our case for a democratic government for London in a document entitled "Voice For London". Frankly, it is ludicrous that, in the previous Government, the so-called Minister for London was the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and that the London police authority was represented by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). Is it any wonder that the new funding formula for the Metropolitan police has meant that we now have 1,000 fewer police officers in London than in 1992? Moreover, we are just a third of the way through implementing the cuts imposed by that formula.

Who was there to stand up for London when our hospitals were closed in favour of new hospitals in the shire counties? Who was there when funding for local government was shifted out of London to those counties? Who was there to stop the draconian cuts that have been imposed this year and will be imposed next year and the year after on funding to London Underground? That was the largest proportionate cut imposed on a single major Government spending programme in the past 10 years.

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman makes allusions to the past 18 years, but he must be aware that the decision to move national health service resources out of London to other parts of the country was taken by the previous Labour Government between 1974 and 1979.

Mr. Hill: That decision was implemented with retrospective resistance by the Labour party during the previous Parliament.

Who was there to highlight the fact that, although London generates one fifth of the Government's revenues, we receive back just one seventh in Government spending? That is why we need a strategic London authority to fight the big battles for London.

We also need such an authority simply to ensure that the city is better administered in terms of Londonwide issues that go beyond the reach of the boroughs. I shall cite a couple of examples of such issues from my experience of transport policy.

I find it incredible that we still have upwards of 50,000 unlicensed minicabs operating in London. Those drivers are subject to no form of scrutiny to guarantee the safety of the public in London. I find it incredible that the previous Government failed to implement the London primary route signing project, which would cost £30 million and would be recouped in one year. Those are the simple straightforward measures that I would expect a Londonwide authority to take up, because they would give us a better city. There are dozens of other examples of how better government could be achieved.

I welcome the Labour party's commitment to democratic government for London, and particularly the proposal for an elected mayor. That person would be a popular focus for civic pride among Londoners and would certainly become a major national figure. We need such a major player to play a leading role in promoting London, especially in terms of economic development and inward investment, which we so desperately need. More than half of the 25 parliamentary constituencies with the highest levels of unemployment are in London. It has more unemployed people by far than any other region in the country.

The mayor must be elected. Given that person's key role as the leader of London, voters have the elementary right to choose who will lead them. That has not always been so when electing London's leaders. An elected mayor confers that right on the voters.

Mr. Livingstone: Can my hon. Friend say why he feels there is a vital right for Londoners to elect a mayor directly when we do not have a directly elected Prime Minister? It seems to me that there is no point of principle between those posts.

Mr. Hill: There are lots of examples from European countries and countries in the British Commonwealth of locally elected mayors who fulfil a promotional role locally and who still operate within an overall parliamentary system. There is no necessary connection. Surely it is horses for courses. We must consider what

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will succeed best, and on the evidence available I believe that there is a powerful case to argue that London needs the focus provided by such a mayor. That person would have the power to go to the Government and to the outside world and make the case for London.

I welcome the Minister's evident commitment to a small strategic London authority—the smaller the better. After all, it will be a strategic authority, whose role will be to co-ordinate, plan, encourage and promote. It will not be in the business of implementing programmes in detail. The last thing we need is conflict with the boroughs as a result of overlapping responsibilities.

There will obviously be ample opportunities to consult in due course on the precise structures of the authority. I hope that the means will be found for the formal involvement of London's business community in that new authority. In the past decade, as a result of the vacuum created by the abolition of the GLC, various business groupings have sprung up or become revitalised as the promoters of London's economy. I am thinking of the London Chamber of Commerce, and especially the London First business organisation, which has done excellent work on behalf of London, not least through its London Pride partnership with the Association of London Government.

It would be foolish to waste such resources. My own feeling is that a strategic London authority should move to an explicit partnership with such bodies, and that could be best achieved by giving it a statutory duty to develop its policies in consultation with the business community.

I welcome the Minister's intimation that a mayor could be elected on a reformed system of election. It would be the mayor's role to represent all, or at least the majority, of Londoners. It would be quite unacceptable if, for example, in a four-way contest on a first past the post basis, we ended up with a mayor who was elected by no more than a quarter of London's voters. Such a result would confer no mandate or legitimacy on the winner. Where it is a matter of electing one person, the alternative vote system is obviously the way to secure majority support.

There are powerful arguments for the adoption of proportional representation for the election of members of the strategic London authority. If we accept the arguments about proportionality for devolution in Scotland and Wales, why not for London? We have said that, in future, we will adopt PR for a reformed House of Lords, so why not for a strategic London authority? Sooner than that, in all probability we will have to introduce PR for European elections, so why not for a Londonwide authority?

As a party and as a Government, we evidently have no principled objection to PR. For excellent reasons, we have stipulated that the strategic London authority should be a lean and mean—*[Interruption.]*—authority with a relatively small number of members. Perhaps not mean, but certainly lean. Let us not even tempt the Opposition into accusations of largesse on the part of this putative authority. At the same time, like any democratic body, the authority should be as representative as possible of the opinions of Londoners—that vast population of more than 6 million—on whose behalf it will act.

The smaller the number of constituencies and the larger their size, the more similar their electoral characteristics are likely to be, and on a first past the post system, the more likely they are to produce the same winner. That could lead to the exclusion not only of so-called minor or third parties but major parties also. It is an arrangement that will almost certainly distort the effects of swing. In other words, we risk a cycle of substantially or exclusively one-party rule in the new authority, and that would undermine both its representational function and the principle of partnership on which it should operate. There are powerful reasons for all political parties to avoid such a scenario.

Although I give enthusiastic support to the Government's proposals for a strategic London authority, I hope that the Government will accept the case for PR as its method of election, on the grounds of both principle and practicality.

11.52 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): We on the Liberal Democrat Benches very much welcome a debate on the governance of London so early in this Parliament. It is the first time—certainly in the five Parliaments that I remember—that we have come so early to this important debate. I welcome the Minister to his new and very important responsibilities, and wish him well in them.

I am encouraged—this is very important—that the Minister intends to adopt a consultative style. There is much wisdom, not just in this place but beyond, and it would be foolish to make decisions that do not distil and draw on the wisdom of people from all backgrounds and walks of life in this great city and beyond to give us the best possible model for the future.

The Minister and his colleagues should listen to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). It will not surprise the Minister to hear that I and my colleagues share the hon. Gentleman's views on many of the points that he made—again from much experience.

I always put the right hon. Member for the Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) at the top of my list of the most erudite and best contributors in the House. I commend him warmly to new Members. If they want a good speech, provided he is on good form—like England were yesterday and he was today—they should come to hear him.

He made a most important point: that, above all, London is a collection of villages. Whatever else we do, we must not forget that it is the communities where individuals live that need most to be supported and strengthened, and nothing that we do strategically or in a macro-economic or macro-political sense must undermine them. There has been far too much breaking down of the communities in London. I could elaborate on that substantially, but it is best left for another debate.

I welcome much of what the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) said, but I challenge him on at least one point. A quick collection of opinion suggests that the hon. Member for Brent, East is right. No European country that does not have a presidential system has elected mayors.

Mr. Hill *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hughes: We can debate it. Italy has a presidential system. The head of state is a President. The point is valid.

The logic of having presidential-type elections for cities and not for the executive head of state needs to be worked through if it is to be argued as having separate validity. The hon. Member for Streatham is also on weak ground on the inability to raise money, for the reason that I mentioned earlier about precepts being transferred across.

The general election showed the House—at last, thank God—that London is a three-party city. It has been for a long time; it is just that this place has been a little slow in reflecting it. For some of the past 14 years, I have indeed been a bit lonely, but one of the great joys of this Parliament is that, on the issue of London government, the two parties that advocated it strongly went up in number considerably, and the one party that denied that view went down considerably.

London has rarely, if ever—not in this century—had so few Tory Members of Parliament. It has never before had as many London Labour Members of Parliament. It has certainly never had as many Liberal or Liberal Democrat Members of Parliament. The fact that Labour increased its strength and that we in the Liberal Democrats doubled our number from our highest previous number deserves to be recorded. It is not just quantity. I can assure the House, from personal experience, that there is no more highly qualified group of Members of Parliament than my new colleagues sitting around me, who come with great experience—I say that in all seriousness—and will contribute greatly to the deliberations of the House. They are hugely valued and welcome.

Mr. Alan Clark: Without in any way disputing the validity of what the hon. Gentleman is saying, let me point out that, in fact, the doubling of strength to which he refers arose purely out of exploiting the first-past-the-post system. I do not mean that as a criticism. Had the election been based on proportional representation—we heard that floated earlier—the number would have diminished, not increased.

Mr. Hughes: As it happens, the right hon. Gentleman may be partly right about the first point, but he is absolutely wrong about the second because, if we had a proportional system of election in London, the Labour party would have nearly half the seats—I remind Labour Members that it did not get 50 per cent. of the vote even in London—the Tory party would have a third of the seats, we would have a sixth of the seats and a sixth of 74 is considerably more than six. We would be better represented and I look forward to his support for PR, which will come—

Mr. Ottaway: The Liberal Democrat vote went down.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, our votes went down nationally by a very small amount but, under PR, the number of Members of Parliament would be proportional to the number of votes. Fifteen per cent. of London Members of Parliament would be Liberal Democrats, as Londoners voted for.

Let us move on to the range of areas for this debate. First, there is no right answer to this question. The governance of London does not have one single right answer and we would be arrogant to think that we knew one. Whatever we do as a result of this process of consultation and then legislation, it will be a best attempt, but it will not be perfect, so let us always seek to improve without being arrogant enough to think that we have a perfect solution.

Secondly, there are no immutable facts. The boundaries of London are arbitrary, just as borough, parish and national boundaries are arbitrary. None of them is writ for all time. Therefore, let us not assume that debate about boundaries is not valid. As it happens, for this debate, I think that it is better to start with the present Greater London boundaries, but I have no theological view that areas currently in London that want to be outside it should not leave, or that areas currently outside that want to join should not join. We need to realise that those things can change and that there should be a mechanism for that sort of change.

Thirdly, we must be clear what we are talking about here. In relation to the main issue in the debate, we are talking about regional government, not traditional local government. However, there is a need for a big debate about traditional local government. The governance of London is not only about having a strategic authority, but about how this place looks after London affairs and what else happens elsewhere.

Until there is a strategic elected authority for London, there should be a special London Grand Committee. All the London Members of Parliament—74 of them—should sit on it and deal with London business, as the Scots, the Welsh and the Northern Irish do on their Committees. London's population is bigger than that in those other three parts of the United Kingdom. Huge issues otherwise impact on the business of the rest of our colleagues, who are not terribly interested in London, and take up time in the House. I seriously suggest that, rather than an all-party London group, it would be perfectly practical to have a London Select Committee or Grand Committee for the next two or three years, which would of course disappear when the strategic body for London is, as I hope that it soon will be, in place.

Below strategic level, I hope that, before this Parliament is over, we shall have started and completed the revision of the ward boundaries throughout London, which has been much delayed. I hope that we shall have set up the parish and community councils, which the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) suggested we would argue for—as we certainly shall. London is the only part of the UK where, by law, we cannot have parish or community government. That is nonsense. The people of London clearly want such government.

There is a later debate about whether the size of the boroughs is right. Personally, I am against big boroughs; I am much happier with smaller boroughs, as they used to be. Once we have a strategic authority, we might consider whether smaller would be better.

There is a strong argument for having annual elections for London councils, as there are elsewhere. When we have a strategic authority, we should do what we do in the rest of the country, where one year in four there are no local elections and we elect the rest of the local councils by thirds. Issues should perhaps go to referendum more often in London government. There is a whole agenda. I want to flag up just that it is not only about a strategic authority, although that is the core debate today.

Let us come to other questions; they could be debated at length, but I will not do that. The Liberal Democrats have long been persuaded that strategic regional issues need strategic regional government. We shall debate later what they should be, but in general terms it is fairly

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obvious what many of them should be. They obviously include economic regeneration, the selling of London, the economy of London and the transport system.

I had an interesting week in Hong Kong—I had never been before—during last week's recess. Hong Kong public transport works wonderfully, and that is one of the reasons why Hong Kong has been so successful. London could be hugely more successful with an effective, functioning and integrated public transport system. That is clearly a Londonwide issue.

Sports policy and the promotion of sports, the arts and culture are clearly Londonwide issues; those subjects, like so many things, fall naturally under strategic responsibilities. I think that the Government are starting at about the right place, as we have, by listing what they should be. Environmental policy clearly is also better dealt with strategically than borough by borough. Let us not argue, therefore, that many things could not be dealt with strategically. Of course, there is no perfection about it, but there are obvious starting points.

That means that we must end some of the ridiculous and bizarre anomalies. Let me take just one. The government of policing in London is like "The Mikado", where the Home Secretary speaks to himself when he speaks to the police authority for London and when the police authority speaks to the Home Secretary. That is bizarre. Not even a constitutional fiction can pretend that he can separate himself in those two functions. Clearly, the government of policing in London, plus the fire and civil defence authorities and so on, should be included. The London police, including the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, want that, and so do the general public.

In answer to the question, "Should there be Londonwide government?" we say strongly and without qualification, "Yes, there should." On the second question, "What should be its powers?", we have a general idea, but we do not pretend that it is perfect. We want to debate the matter, and we welcome the Green and White Paper process.

The third question is, "Should there be a directly elected mayor?" The Minister knows my view, and that of my party, in advance. We are not persuaded. Many of the reasons against the idea that were advanced by the hon. Member for Brent, East are strong and good. Some of my hon. Friends favour the prospect more than others, but we have debated it internally, and, on balance, collectively, we are not persuaded.

It is true that the post might produce a highly paid non-political, or apolitical, individual, very susceptible to influence. Some of the arguments citing parallels elsewhere are not valid. For example, I remind hon. Members that the mayor of Paris is not directly elected. He is no more than the leader of the majority group in the arrondissement that represents the centre of the Greater Paris area.

Therefore, we can have a strong figurehead who arrives by that route, as leaders of the Greater London council have done in the past. The history of London provides us with powerful arguments showing that, when the city has had a strategic authority, it has not needed a strong separately elected person. The Horace Cutlers, the Herbert Morrisons and the Ken Livingstones were strong enough, and it was clear enough that they spoke for London, without their needing to be separately elected.

With such leaders, there are also strong arguments involving accountability to their party and to the electorate as a whole. Moreover, in many places where mayors are directly elected, the turnout is appallingly low—sometimes as low as 25 per cent. We sometimes think that we already have bad turnouts in some parts of our capital city, so that risk must be borne in mind.

Local authority chief executives are clearly unhappy. Of course, I understand why local authority leaders would be unhappy, because they might be overshadowed by the more glamorous prestigious post above them. There are also questions about the division of responsibilities.

Without wanting to engage in a full debate on the subject now, I point out to the Minister that, even if he wants to follow his manifesto closely, I do not believe that it necessarily traps him into having a referendum with only one question. I shall finish my speech by suggesting what the questions should be.

In summary, we are not persuaded by the argument that there should be a mayor. We are against the idea, and we ask the Government to reconsider. I know that that argument was their starting point for the debate, but clearly it divides both the Labour party and Londoners, and is not yet an idea whose time has come.

Incidentally, if we decide that London should have a directly elected mayor, should there not equally logically be a directly elected mayor for every city and town in the United Kingdom? If not, why not? In fairness to other cities, we need to have that debate before we localise the issue in London.

Should there be power to lower and raise taxes? The hon. Member for Streatham and I may or may not disagree. My answer is clearly yes. A Londonwide authority that could only ever spend what the Government gave it would be a paper tiger. Many good people would not stand for election if they thought that they would have no power to decide what Londoners should pay. Londoners did not object when the GLC had the power to raise money. Indeed, they often voted Labour because they knew that the Labour party would raise more money to spend on London's services—for example, to change the regime for London transport.

The logic of representation is the ability to raise taxation. It would be nonsense if borough councils could not do so, and equally it would be nonsense if a Londonwide body could not do so. Of course, the new body should take over all the funds of the Government office for London and the myriad quangos and other organisations. The host of other bodies makes quite a saga. There are 12 different authorities for transport alone—one for the traffic lights, one for the planning of white lines, and so on. It is nonsense—comedy, even.

I hope that the Government will trust the people of London enough to allow them to decide whether there should be tax-raising powers, and if so, to allow those elected to make the decisions. It would be nonsense if they did not have that power.

Should there be a referendum? Yes. There should be a referendum for Londoners, including all those electors who are resident in the capital city, before the legislation comes into force. Should there be one or more question? There should be more than one. There should be one question about whether we want a strategic authority, one about a directly elected mayor and one about tax-raising and lowering powers. Of course the authority must be able to put taxes down if it can put them up.

The final question—although perhaps I might prefer it if we did not have to ask such a question—would be: should the body be elected by a proportional system? The Government may be committed to a referendum during this Parliament on a proportional system for national elections, but we need it for London, too. I hope that they will take our advice that we need a proportional system.

My final point concerns the proposed timetable, with which—the Minister will gather—I have a problem. I am not suggesting that he has reached a final view, and I accept that we need a debate on the matter. The Prime Minister got into trouble on Wednesday on a similar issue, and I do not want the Minister to get into the same trouble. We shall have a Green Paper—I welcome that. My colleagues and I will be constructive during discussions before, during and after the Green Paper. We shall then have a debate in light of the public's response to that.

Our view is that the White Paper with the Bill attached—as suggested by Conservative Members—should then be the basis for the vote. I share the Minister's view that voting should take place next May at the same time as the local elections. That is logical, as it will save money and will encourage more people to vote. I assure him that, if we reach agreement on the timetable, my party will co-operate to make sure that the Bill progresses quickly through the House next year. There need be no fear that the Bill will not be on the statute book in time to have a referendum in May simply because the Bill is not passed as early as the Minister envisages.

We welcome this debate and we look forward with excitement to Londonwide government by the millennium. We shall collaborate constructively, although we shall criticise where the Government are wrong, from this day on.

12.10 pm

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I have been made aware of the conventions of maiden speeches, especially the tradition of paying tribute to one's predecessors. I have no problem with praising many of the previous Members of Parliament for Hayes and Harlington: men such as Walter Ayles, a good socialist who took a special interest in aid to Africa; Arthur Skeffington, a superb housing Minister in the Wilson Government; and Neville Sandelson, a good man who unfortunately fell victim to the delusions of grandeur of David Owen.

Despite my respect for the conventions of the House, I shall not perjure myself by praising my immediate Tory predecessor. Many saw him simply as a Tory buffoon, and he was once described as a "pig's bladder on a stick". When he chose as his election slogan, "We love Dicks", we were not sure whether to laugh or to call in the obscene publications squad. However, Terry Dicks was not a joke. He was a stain on the character of this House, the Conservative party which harboured him and the good name of my constituency. He brought shame on the political process of this country by his blatant espousal of racism and his various corrupt dealings. He demeaned the House by his presence, and I deeply regret that the Conservative party failed to take action to stem his flow of vile bigotry. Thankfully, my constituents can now say good riddance to this malignant creature.

My speech in this debate, and many others today, have been more than 10 years in the waiting. In the newspapers this week, we have seen pictures of 50,000 people demonstrating for democracy by holding candles in a park in Hong Kong. More than a decade ago in our capital city, more than 250,000 Londoners stood silently in Jubilee gardens on the last night of the GLC when the lights were turned out in County hall. As the GLC councillor for Hayes and Harlington council and deputy leader of the authority, I was among them, and we tearfully sang "We'll Meet Again". After all this time, we are about to meet again.

The abolition of the GLC was self-evidently an act of malignant spite by a Prime Minister in the first demented throes of megalomania. Harold Laski, a good socialist and once the chair of the Labour party, prophetically explained that Britain would not experience fascism in the form of a strutting Mussolini or Hitler, but instead was vulnerable to a form of Conservative authoritarianism arrived at by the slow incremental erosion of our civil liberties and democratic institutions. Under the Thatcher regime, the institution of democratic local government was bombarded by the introduction of rate capping, the surcharging of the Lambeth councillors and the abolition of the GLC, culminating in the establishment of the government of our capital city by an appointed state: the appointment of Tories, by Tories, to line the pockets of Tories.

What has that plethora of quangos and joint committees achieved for our city? In the custodial care of the Tory appointees, 40,000 families in London are homeless every year; up to 3,000 people sleep on our streets in winter; crime has doubled, with a terrifying and unrelenting increase in violence; our manufacturing and economic base has collapsed; our health service is in crisis; and our transport system is gridlocked, with the effect that traffic is slower than at the turn of the century. Many of us will never forget or forgive the Tories for the scale of their neglect of our city.

For most of the past decade, I served as the chief executive of the Association of London Authorities, and latterly the Association of London Government. After 10 long years of designing blueprints for a new strategic authority in that capacity, I am naturally pleased that, at last, we have the opportunity to start the reconstruction process. I also warmly welcome the fact that, in the spirit of open government and inclusiveness, there is to be a thorough consultation process, including a Green Paper, a White Paper and a referendum before the final legislation.

It is critical in the consultation process that views are honestly expressed and listened to if we are to avoid putting in place a structure that we shall live to regret. In that spirit, I want to set out some initial views on the basic architecture of the proposed new government for the capital.

There was a consultation process in the Labour party on the structural options for the new authority, but it is no secret that the proposal for a directly elected mayor was the result of enthusiasm from above.

I have tried to analyse why, deep within me, I have such reservations about the proposal; it is certainly not because of an emotive claim that the system is somehow alien to this country. It is partly because it grates against my notion of democratic socialist practice, which involves the development of a policy programme by the party for presentation to the electorate, and in which the electors vote primarily for a set of ideas and policies associated

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with an ideology and advocated by a party rather than voting for their impressions of an individual. That is a vote for the many, not the few—and certainly not for one.

I also have practical concerns about accountability and the potential for the abuse of power and corruption in a mayoral system. Nevertheless, the proposal for a directly elected mayor was contained in the manifesto on which our party was elected, so I look to the detail of the design of the relationship between the mayor and the elected authority to ensure political accountability and to secure probity.

The checks and balances that are essential to ensure accountability would at a minimum include, for example, the election of the mayor's cabinet by, and from among, the authority members; the approval by the authority of the overall budget and major spending decisions; a system of scrutiny of policy making; the ratification by the authority of any senior staffing appointments; and the right of the authority to express no confidence in the mayor and to trigger an election—in effect, a right of recall.

The strategic role and powers of the new authority are almost self-evident in terms of the immediate and concrete needs of Londoners: economic regeneration; an efficient integrated transport system; a decent environment; and a feeling of safety from crime and hazards.

My plea is simply that the legislation that we pass be sufficiently flexible to enable the new authority to meet new challenges as they arise. That may require a more general power of intervention, if necessary triggered by a decision by the electorate, the Secretary of State or the House.

On funding, I agree that the allocation of powers and responsibilities without resources is pointless. The inheritance of existing precepts and the transfer of grant from central Government without capping, combined with the ability to borrow, would go a long way towards resourcing the new authority and achieving some economies of scale that would release new money. I also plead for flexibility in the legislation, to enable the new authority to explore new funding streams, possibly by hypothecated levies again triggered by the Government, by the House or by referendums.

Some discussions have already taken place on the location of the new authority. Naturally, I prefer the retrieval of county hall, if necessary by compulsory purchase. I would certainly welcome an inquiry into the sale of county hall under the previous regime.

As an alternative, the Middlesex guildhall across Parliament square would be suitable. We have been informed that the Prime Minister has assured the Corporation of the City of London of its continued existence. Thus, the City's guildhall is not available for use.

Labour remains committed to reforming the City's archaic and undemocratic procedures. I hope that the City corporation will produce its own options for reform. By way of an incentive to expedite matters, I give notice that, unless reform proposals are forthcoming at the appropriate stage of the Bill enacting the new authority, I am minded to seek to insert a clause to abolish the City corporation—a generally uncontentious measure, I suggest.

On the representative nature of the authority, whatever its size and method of election, I would argue that it should reflect the gender balance and ethnic diversity of our community. We should ensure the full involvement of all the social partners, of both sides of industry in the capital, in its deliberations and decision making.

As a child, my first political awareness came when Wilson was in Government, John F. Kennedy was President of the United States and Martin Luther King had a dream—a dream of a new society, of equality and decency for our children. I believe that the last Greater London council administration was part of that dream; it was about building a new beginning for our city. The new authority that we are putting in place will be part of the procedure that will allow us to dream that dream again; a dream of a decent civil society in which equality reigns. I am pleased that I am going to be part of the process of making that dream a reality.

12.20 pm

Mr. Alan Clark (Kensington and Chelsea): I am delighted to accord with the conventions of the House by paying tribute to the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell). I found many parts of it interesting and constructive, but some, as he predicted, contentious. I note that he did not accord with convention by paying a generous tribute to his immediate predecessor. I remind him that Mr. Dicks won three successive general elections. To criticise Mr. Dicks in the language and manner that he did must to some degree impugn the judgment of his electorate, which happily returned Mr. Dicks three times.

I wonder whether the electorate's decision had anything to do with the record of Mr. Dicks's predecessor, Neville Sandelson, who received a good deal of intemperate and critical correspondence in his closing years of representing the Labour party here. One letter addressed to "Neville Sandelson MP, House of Commons" said something along the lines of, "We never see you. As far as we are concerned, you do not exist. Are you too posh to come to your constituency?" He simply sealed it up and wrote on the envelope, "Not known at this address," and put it back in the post. There is a limit to the number of times that one can do that to one's constituents.

I am one of only two Conservative Members who represent inner-city constituencies. I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Sir Nicholas Scott, whose courage, humanity and dedication to his work, both as a constituency Member and a Minister, made him widely liked in the House. That was not least because he was part of the diminishing band of hon. Members who seemed untainted by the rigours of doctrine or prejudice. He was widely liked both here and in his constituency.

Proportional representation has been mentioned. I remind the House that I am also one of only two Conservative Members in the whole country to have been elected by 55 per cent. of their electorate. I mention that because there is a feeling abroad that inner cities have an in-built anti-Conservative prejudice, and that it is not possible for Conservative Members to represent them.

My constituency contains delightful architecture, thriving small businesses, trees, squares, and leafy avenues: enough greenery to satisfy even my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who always tried to apply the garden city solution to the

problems of inner-city deprivation. Closely connected with that is a splendid, robust, diligent local authority. The majority party in the local authority in my constituency has not lost a seat at a local council election since 1978.

Many Conservative Members have been steadily undermined by intrusions into the local authority system. That has never happened in Kensington and Chelsea, and if one visits the royal borough, one understands why. One can see everywhere the results of the local authority's labours and endeavours to make it the most congenial location in Greater London.

This is, in a sense, a maiden speech, so I do not want to be contentious, unlike the previous speaker. However, I should make some reference to the Labour party's failure to make any intrusion in the local authority balance in the division, and to the bizarre campaign that was run by my Labour opponent in the general election. It is a cautionary tale for all hon. Members.

My opponent was a Labour councillor, who separated himself from his preoccupations with his council duties to run a campaign that seemed to centre on the recruitment of various participants in my private life. They were issued with Labour party badges, and were paraded around the constituency to tell my electors how wicked I was. The only criterion that one can apply to that technique is to record the fact that the anti-Conservative swing in Kensington and Chelsea was very much less than it was in the rest of Greater London.

I should like to raise two points. The first relates to the issue of a referendum. It is odd that the Government are so keen on referendums, when they have only just arrived in the House in colossal strength. What curious sense of insecurity pervades Labour Members that on practically every subject their confidence fails them? They could say, "This is what will happen. We have the people's endorsement": "people" is their favourite word—I notice that they introduce it into practically every text, which is clearly an instruction from the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), but none the worse for that.

Why must the Government have all these referendums? Given their colossal majority and immense strength, what is the point of wasting time and money "consulting the people" by referendums?

The Minister said that the referendum will produce an endorsement of the principle. Why do the Government need an endorsement? They have just won the general election, so why bother to go round again and try to get an endorsement? The only point of a referendum would be to analyse and dissect the regional or borough conclusions. If they seek the decision and the judgment of the people, they may get a fragmentation of the result. In some districts and boroughs, the people—to use the corporate term so popular with Labour Members—do not want a strategic authority or a mayor.

Another question that was posed must be answered quickly. What is the division of power to be between the mayor and the strategic authority? Who is in charge? They will not agree all the time and will probably start disagreeing immediately. Who will have the last word?

Another question involves the title of mayor. I caution the Labour party against adopting that title in this context. There is already a Lord Mayor in London and it is an ancient and historic title. The Lord Mayor of London is an international symbol of London, certainly the City of London. The Lord Mayor travels abroad and, wherever he goes, he is received almost as a sort of miniature head of state. All the ceremony that he offers to his visitors is extended to him. He already plays an enormously important role in spreading prestige and recruiting business—all things that, we are told, another mayor would do for the city. The Lord Mayor plays a conspicuous and important role.

If two people both carry the title mayor—one Lord Mayor, the other mayor—how will they relate? Will that not create muddle, not least among the media, whose ability to master such distinctions after 3 pm is often diminished? I foresee a lot of potential confusion. Could we not, at this early stage, before the term mayor is set in concrete, think of alternative titles? How about governor? Does not that appeal to anyone? As many Labour Members are europhiles, how about the title prefect? Consideration must be paid to the various factors.

We need far more detail of what is proposed. The important question that has been posed and to which no answer has been given involves the fact that we must have the White Paper and the Bill before the referendum. If we do not, not only will the referendum be a waste of time and money, because the Labour party already has such a colossal majority in Parliament, but it will contain a fraudulent element. If the Labour Government must have a referendum, they should hold it only after the detail that it contains has been put before the House for discussion and debate.

12.32 pm

Mrs. Eileen Gordon (Romford): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker for calling me to make my maiden speech. I had to get here so early this morning that, after yesterday's late night sitting, I had to check that I did not have my fluffy slippers and dressing gown on when I walked into the Chamber. Since being elected, I have been on a steep learning curve, and last night it seemed to be downhill all the way.

I am honoured to be in this place representing the people of Romford in the London borough of Havering. The stereotype of Essex man and woman—of bimbo and himbo—with white stilettos and white socks has become a joke. Romford is like anywhere else: a mixture of people, all trying to do the best for themselves and their families.

I have spent most of my life in Romford, so the House must excuse me if my speech is a little parochial. Romford is an old market town; in fact, this year the market celebrates its 750th anniversary. One of the largest open air markets in the country and its traders play an integral part in the town's life and economy. The town is at the crossroads of London and Essex: from the 18th-century coaches that used to pass through, to the commuter trains of today, there has always been a bustle and movement of people through the town.

Mention of coaches and coaching inns reminds me of our famous Romford brewery which, until 1992, filled Romford with the delicious smell of brewing. The manufacturing side of that industry closed that year and many skilled workers lost their jobs. I and many others still miss that distinctive smell wafting over the town, and those people certainly miss their jobs. The distribution side of the industry stayed, but that, too, is now threatened by a proposed merger, which my constituents who work in the brewery tell me they do not want. I hope that the

[Mrs. Eileen Gordon]

merger—which is now before the Monopolies and Mergers Commission—will be closely examined by the Government, because my town cannot afford to lose hundreds of highly skilled jobs and suffer the knock-on effects on the town's economy.

As I said, Romford is at the crossroads and, after the second world war, many families moved there from the war-torn east end of London. My family were given a house in Harold Hill, which, at that time, was in the Romford constituency. The three-bedroom house built by the London county council, which later became the Greater London council, was like utopia to my family, and the move and everything that followed transformed their lives and those of their children, including me.

Today, people still choose to move out of London, and many of them commute to the city each day. They are concerned about job security, housing, transport and health—issues that we covered in our general election pledges, which they endorsed.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Michael Neubert, who, although never an Essex man, represented Romford for more than 20 years and earned my respect for his opposition to the closure of services at Oldchurch hospital. Just as the market is at the heart of our community, Oldchurch hospital is an integral part of our lives. The Conservative Government's decision to close the accident and emergency department was a bad mistake—I do not want to be too controversial, but it was one of many.

I am pleased that Oldchurch hospital will be included in the review of London health services being carried out by the Labour Government and I am sure that, this time, the views of local people and their representatives will be listened to. Issues such as the future of our hospital services have to be examined Londonwide, because each hospital affects others in the area and elsewhere across London. That is why I welcome today's debate on the governance of London.

The first thing I put on my desk at the House of Commons was a photograph of my children at a protest against the abolition of the GLC. Although we admit that the GLC's structure had faults, we all know in our hearts that it was abolished not because it was a failure, but because it was successful. It provided valuable services for Londoners and promoted London-wide policies such as the "Fares Fair" transport system, which I thought was absolutely brilliant and which my constituents still talk about. That is precisely what we need in London—strategic planning.

We have only to look around us to know how attractive London is and how many tourists come here. We live in a beautiful capital city, full of history and pageant, but it is not a museum—real people live here and many have problems. It is not a theme park, to be closed at night, and nor is it a group of walled boroughs, each completely isolated and looking after its own interests. Although we have the village philosophy, we need to co-operate. What happens to London in business and transport affects my constituents and everyone throughout London.

I love London, as do my constituents. I would not choose to live anywhere else, but London deserves better than it has had over the past 11 years. We shall not impose a strategic body on Londoners; we shall hold a referendum to ask them whether they want one. I am confident that they will give a resounding yes to a strategic London authority, bringing about regeneration and cross-London planning on transport, environment and many other issues.

Just as Romford is a crossroads, I believe that London is at the crossroads of making a great decision to look to a better, more exciting future.

12.39 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am delighted to see you in the Chair; thank you for calling me in this important debate.

I join all Members on both sides of the House in congratulating the hon. Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) on her maiden speech, which she gave with assurance and panache. I listened with interest as she spoke of the importance of Romford as a market town for more than 750 years. The laws governing Romford market have a reverberating effect even in my constituency, about seven miles away. I listened with interest when she pointed out the importance of the brewing industry in Romford. I was especially pleased that she paid tribute to her predecessor, Sir Michael Neubert, who was widely respected on both sides of the House and served the people of Romford with distinction for 23 years.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), remarking on the state of the Conservative party in London after 1 May, said that we might approach our responsibilities with decent humility and decent wariness. I can oblige him in response to the first part of that statement because, as the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford)—whom I am glad to see in his new place with his new responsibilities—quite out of order, introduced us visually to his new geopolitical map of London, it came to me vividly that I might be described as the blue pimple on London's head.

In my brief remarks, I shall genuinely seek information on, and question the basis of what I believe to be, the Government's approach to the governance of London and the introduction of a Greater London authority.

I have some questions to ask the Under-Secretary of State and his ministerial colleagues. I understood from a speech in the debate on the Loyal Address a couple of weeks or so ago that the Government originally intended to publish a White Paper on London later in the summer—I believe that that was the phrase. We now hear that a Green Paper will be published next month. I have no quarrel with that; in fact, it is preferable not to dispense with a Green Paper.

However, I wonder whether, on such an important issue, a three-month consultation period is sufficient, especially as it will embrace what is euphemistically described as the holiday period—in the case of Parliament, the summer recess. More important, the Under-Secretary will need more than three months before he publishes the White Paper, because he will want to consider points that have been made, so I would not expect that White Paper to be published before December at the earliest, and probably early 1998.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and others, I sincerely believe that the Bill should be published before a referendum is held,

because I fear that the Government have put the cart before the horse. They are saying that a new government for London is a good thing, but they have not spelt out the implications, one of the most important of which must be the cost to Londoners of doing what the Government seek to do.

A governmental system for London that includes an elected Greater London authority and a separately elected mayor, may be a recipe for division and disappointment. There is such a thing—it is embedded in human nature—as empire building. If I were directly elected as a member of the Greater London authority, I would recognise the importance of that responsibility and would seek to represent my constituents as best I could, just as I do in the House. But if I were elected mayor of Greater London—I assure the House that I am not seeking the job—I would believe that I had the support of the majority of Londoners when representing their interests in a way that might differ from the way in which a member of the GLA might think their interests should be represented. I ask the Minister to consider that carefully.

There is also the matters of costs and how the money is to be raised. Here, I agreed with one of the many points made by my recently reintroduced right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark).

There will also be confusion between the roles of the mayor of Greater London and of the Lord Mayor of London. Perhaps a different title should be given to the newer office holder.

I have considerable concern about the structure, role and responsibilities of the GLA. Of course, it will take strategic decisions, but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal pointed out, such decisions often extend well beyond the boundaries of Greater London. Some tube lines go well outside the area; the Metropolitan police area also goes outside it in at least two places. Such complications can be overcome, but they must be recognised for what they are.

If it is the will of the people of London that the Government bring in a Bill, the Government will have to be very careful when dividing up planning responsibilities. There was great confusion under the old GLC. I declare a possible conflict of interest: I am a non-practising chartered town and country planner. The Minister will recall that, under the old system, certain planning applications, if passed by the London borough—the local planning authority—had to go to the GLC for approval. Many people asked why the GLC had to approve them, given that they had first been approved by the London borough. If, however, the GLC turned down a strategic planning application, the applicants could go to the Secretary of State on appeal.

Is such a division of planning functions necessary, with the introduction of a second tier of government for London? Do the Government intend strategic planning decisions to go directly to the GLA, or will the GLA exercise the role of the Secretary of State in the planning appeals process? If the latter, the transfer of the planning inspectorate to London will involve additional costs. Without a clear demarcation, I foresee problems. That is one of the areas where, whatever the Government decide, the result will be that powers are taken away from the London boroughs. That could happen in other areas—education, for example.

I note that the Government's paper, "A Voice for London", issued in April 1996, said that the Greater London authority would be responsible for identifying educational and training needs across London. Is that not precisely what London boroughs and TECs—training and enterprise councils—are doing in London? If the GLA is to do that, will there not be an unnecessary duplication of bureaucracy? However, the Government may have it in mind to give additional powers to the GLA which will mean taking certain powers away from the London boroughs as the local educational authorities. The issues must be examined closely.

There is to be a new police board. How many people will serve on it? There are 32 London boroughs, plus the City of London, although it has a separate police authority, which may be a point to consider. It is said in the Labour party election manifesto or in "A Voice for London" and probably in both—I hope that they are consistent—that a majority of the members of the new police board would be members of the Greater London authority, but there will be nominees from London boroughs and other organisations. Clearly, that will not include every London borough. Will that be a point of dissension? Careful thought must be given to the matter before the new police board is set up.

I give one other example, on the vexed question of health. To mention health in the London borough of Barnet causes great controversy, about which we may hear if a Labour Member catches your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

A Labour party paper states that the new Greater London authority will give an annual report on the health of the capital. Surely that can be gleaned already from the annual reports of the local health authorities. Is there any need for an additional bureaucracy to do that? The task can hardly be taken away from the local health authorities, because the information will have to be gleaned from them by the new GLA. Again, there could be confusion or unnecessary bureaucracy, unless—I dare to suggest—the Government have it in mind that the GLA will take certain health powers away from the local health authorities or the NHS trusts. That point must be looked into with great care.

I shall finish by trying to encapsulate the problems that my constituents will face if the proposal proceeds after the referendum. Chipping Barnet, which is a third of the London borough of Barnet, originally used to be in Hertfordshire. I readily acknowledge that the GLC was introduced by a Conservative Government. Although I was not around Chipping Barnet at the time, I am sure that, if there had been a referendum then, 95 per cent. of my constituents living then would have said that they wanted no part of the amorphous new Greater London area. My constituency has been enlarged. Parts of it were in the old Middlesex, but the same situation would have arisen for those constituents.

What price did Barnet pay 30 years ago and more when the GLC was set up? It lost the immediacy and the local flavour of the lowest—I do not mean that in the pejorative sense—level of local government. It lost its urban district council, rural district council and municipal borough. My constituents have to travel further to get decisions made on local matters, such as street lighting and street cleaning.

The plus side was that the London boroughs took on more responsibilities than the old urban district councils, rural district councils and municipal boroughs. For

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

example, they took on the responsibility of education. Decisions on education had been decided metaphorically at county hall at Hertford. Thereafter, decisions were made at Hendon town hall or, literally, Friern Barnet town hall. Certain important functions were handled, and decisions taken, on a more local level.

Over-arching all that was the Greater London council. When the GLC was first formed, it had specific powers. Those powers grew, but not officially through an Act of Parliament. They intervened, however, more and more in more and more areas. That was the cause of the GLC's unpopularity in my constituency.

I ask the Government to examine carefully the proposed functions and responsibilities that we are considering. I fear that my constituents may get the worst of both worlds. My initial conclusion is that, whatever I may have read about the Government's intentions—I accept, of course, that the Green Paper has not yet been published—there will be more bureaucracy, greater costs and more remote local government.

Who will pay the increased costs? Will the Government meet a higher proportion of the standard spending assessment or will the Bill be met by the council tax payer? If the latter, what part will business play? I do not know whether it is the Government's intention dramatically to alter or abolish the uniform business rate, but, unless they do so, the additional costs will fall on the council tax payer, not on local traders and businesses.

It has been said in the debate that 70 per cent. of businesses in London want a Greater London authority. That enhances my argument that it is superficially popular to have a GLA when my constituents are being offered a menu without being told the cost. I shall do all that I can to influence the Government in a constructive and, as far as possible, non-controversial spirit to publish the Bill before the referendum, even if that means delaying the referendum beyond 7 May 1998. The electors are surely entitled to know exactly what they are voting for rather than merely being asked to vote on trust, with the so-called—but vital—details to be sorted out later.

12.58 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I am pleased to be able to make my maiden speech on the important topic of the future of London. I thank the people of Hendon for putting their confidence in me and in new Labour by electing me as the first Member for the new constituency of Hendon. I congratulate them on having the full set of a Labour-led council, a Labour Member of the European Parliament and a Labour Member in this place.

I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) and for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) on their excellent maiden speeches. I shall follow the usual convention of acknowledging the work of my predecessors in representing Hendon constituencies.

Sir John Gorst represented the old seat of Hendon, North for 27 years. He was a respected constituency Member. Most recently he stood up for Edgware general hospital, unfortunately without success, against his own Government, who decided to close it in the run-up to the election. I should also like to mention John Marshall, because part of the old seat of Hendon, South has been incorporated into mine. He worked hard for his constituents, in particular to build links with the Jewish community. His work on holocaust denial was extremely important to his constituents, and I intend to follow it up.

When preparing for this speech, I looked up the maiden speech of Hendon's last Labour Member, Mrs. Ayrton Gould, who was elected in 1945. Her speech was a brave one for the time as she called for the sharing of atom secrets and better relations with Russia. Since then, the cold war has come and gone and her ideals are at last coming to fruition.

I suspect that if Mrs. Ayrton Gould visited Hendon today, she would barely recognise it. In 1945, she would have known Hendon aerodrome, which was vital to our wartime defence, and the original home of British aviation, where Claud Grahame-White first flew aircraft in this country. The aerodrome is now gone, but parts of its structure can still be found in the magnificent Royal Air Force museum, which is well worth a visit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you have never been. The site is also home to Grahame Park, one of the biggest public housing estates in London. It is one of the areas to which I intend to pay particular interest in the House. Part of that site has also been transformed into the Peel centre, the premier police training establishment in the country.

I also doubt whether Mrs. Ayrton Gould could have anticipated the dramatic economic shift in the constituency from manufacturing and engineering to the retail sector, which includes Brent Cross, one of the country's most important shopping centres. She could not have anticipated the wonderfully exciting, diverse and vibrant multi-ethnic community that Hendon has become.

Perhaps I should also mention another former resident of Hendon, my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) who is an old boy of Hendon school. Incidentally, he is also a constituent of mine in my Westminster council ward.

Mr. Merchant: Oh, dear.

Mr. Dismore: I am not sure whether that will get me into trouble.

Hendon is a constituency of contrasts. It consists of the apparently better-off areas of Hale, Edgware, Mill Hill and what people know as Hendon proper, and areas of great need such as Burnt Oak and parts of Colindale and West Hendon. Despite those outward differences, Hendon shares many concerns which the proposed authority for London can and will address.

Given that 5,000 families—almost one in four households of working age—have no breadwinner, a strategic authority, fighting here and abroad for inward investment, will play a vital role in rejuvenating the capital's economy. That will bring jobs to Hendon and elsewhere in the capital.

Once the authority has overall responsibility for London's transport, it will be able to put into practice Labour's commitment to an integrated transport network. At last it will be able to make a start on tackling years of Tory failure which have led to a three-year delay to the desperately needed track modernisation of the Northern line. That has caused much misery to Hendon commuters.

The overall, unifying concern of my constituents, which dominates all others, is health. The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) referred to that, and

we share a common interest in the provision of health services in Barnet. Although the delivery of health care must remain the job of the NHS, I hope that the new Londonwide authority will adopt a strategic role to monitor the provision of health services in London.

As I have already said, immediately before the general election the Conservatives rushed through the closure of Edgware general hospital, including its accident and emergency department. That caused chaos at the alternative facilities of Barnet and Northwick Park. It also caused distress to those of my constituents who unfortunately needed A and E treatment. They have to make long and difficult journeys to those alternative facilities, such as that in the constituency of the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet. They face intolerable waiting times of up to four hours at Barnet and up to eight hours at Northwick Park.

Indeed, on occasions, that hospital had to refuse to treat any further patients. This left my constituents in pain and distress as they have had to wait far too long, often overnight, on hospital trolleys until treatment was available. I am grateful, therefore, to my hon. Friend the Minister for Health for the review that he announced into the problems caused by the over-hasty closure of Edgware hospital and how they can best be solved and public confidence in the NHS restored in Barnet.

I also passionately believe that the wide-ranging review into what can now be achieved at Edgware represents an exciting opportunity and challenge to all of us in Hendon and the neighbouring constituencies—the community, Members of Parliament, councillors, health service staff, health authorities and trusts—because for the first time, in what I am sure will be an extremely open and participative process, we will be given a chance to work together, to build a consensus, to identify needs, priorities and resources and to develop ideas for Edgware hospital for the 21st century, building up the service rather than having plans imposed from above, as always happened in the past 18 years under the Conservatives.

If the proposed London authority is to have a health monitoring role, and if the review works, as I confidently expect it to, I am sure that it will prove a valuable model of community participation in health planning—a model of which the new London authority can take heed.

For those reasons, and many others, my constituents welcome the Government's plan for a Londonwide authority. When we have the referendum, the people of Hendon will overwhelmingly support the proposal.

1.6 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), although a daunting prospect because he gave us such an entertaining and interesting speech. I congratulate him on making such an erudite maiden speech.

I would also like to offer the hon. Gentleman my sympathy and condolence for having the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) in his constituency. This obviously brings a new meaning to the big brother state. I hope that the health service in the hon. Gentleman's constituency improves, because having the hon. Member for Hartlepool looking over his shoulder all the time might not be good for his health.

From listening to Labour Members and to my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), it is clear that a great consensus is emerging on the new government for London. That consensus spreads to the wider community—the business community, as the Minister said, in the boroughs, and in the population of London as a whole. The need to remove the quango state that was introduced by the previous Government, and the need for a strategic authority that is democratically accountable to the people and will take a strategic perspective on issues such as employment, transport and the environment—issues that affect the daily lives of our constituents—is crucial.

There is a genuine debate, however, about the suitability and appropriateness of having a directly elected mayor. My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey described our position clearly. I am concerned that we will have some very odd hybrid if we have an elected authority and a directly elected mayor. The mandates will clash. It will be a recipe for confusion, and the only way around that—perhaps a separation of powers model—is a recipe for gridlock.

I see no merit in a directly elected mayor. Indeed, I endorse the remarks of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). Why are we not going for the tried and tested model of party competition for the new strategic authority? That seems sensible. I would support a strategic authority that was elected in a proportionally representative system. I urge the Minister not to be affected by "manifestitis" and to be open to the idea of having a multi-question referendum.

I am very grateful for having this early opportunity to make my maiden speech. I am the first ever Member of Parliament for the new constituency of Kingston and Surbiton. It was formed from the old Surbiton seat and from the southern part of the old Kingston upon Thames seat and covers a number of communities, from Malden Rushett, Chessington and Hook in the south, through to Tolworth, Berrylands, New Malden, Norbiton and Worcester Park. It covers three quarters of the royal borough of Kingston, which through its long and distinguished history has previously returned only Conservative Members of Parliament to the House, so I am especially pleased that the royal borough is now represented on the Liberal Democrat Benches, by me and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge). It is a great responsibility, but I look forward to meeting the challenge.

My predecessor in the Surbiton seat, Richard Tracey, was first elected in 1983. He has a long history of public service and, on behalf of my constituents, I thank him for all his work over the years for the people who live in the Surbiton area. I trust that his experience in the media as a former BBC presenter will suit him well as he embarks on a new career.

My predecessor in the Kingston upon Thames seat was perhaps better known in the House. I recommend that hon. Members who want to inquire about how he is getting on go to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), from whom I understand that Mr. Lamont is doing very well. He is remembered affectionately by many of his constituents, whom he helped.

In a former life, I was an avid reader of his speeches as I used to assist my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) in his many battles

[Mr. Edward Davey]

with the former Chancellor, but it is not Mr. Lamont's speeches as Chancellor that I reflected on in making my maiden speech and wanting to pay tribute to him. I looked back at his very good maiden speech, which I recommend to other hon. Members. I should like to quote one or two phrases from it because they reflect interestingly on recent debates.

For example, Mr. Lamont said early on in his speech:

"I have to admit that for some years I have been strongly pro-European."

Hansard does not record whether he said that sotto voce, but he went on:

"I hope that everyone will agree that by making an uncompromisingly European speech I am being as non-controversial as it is possible to be."

If only that were still the case. I recommend the speech because it talks about the advantages of European governance. He said:

"At least in the Community there is nothing secret about the way in which the Commission's thinking is developing."

It is a shame only that, when he took office, he did not reflect on those views and still kept, unfortunately, the Budget purdah. I hope that this Government will be a little more open.

My favourite part of the speech is when the former Chancellor discussed the foreign exchange markets. He referred to currency volatility in the early 1970s and stated:

"One wonders how much of last year's currency upheaval could have been avoided had there been a joint European strategy".—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1972; Vol. 840, c. 1887-92.]

How times have changed since 1972.

I do not, however, want to dwell on the past. My constituents' main concern is education—our future. Kingston schools are extremely popular, and teachers, parents, governors, councillors and council officials work very hard to deliver high-quality education in our area, but in recent years their efforts have been thwarted by cuts imposed by central Government, which have led to huge overcrowding and some of the largest class sizes in the country.

Efforts to absorb those cuts from central Government have proved impossible within the current draconian system of local government finance, so, unfortunately, some of the cuts have been experienced in schools. To meet previous cuts, the authority had to run down its reserves, which are now at the minimum prudential level, yet in the past three years the grant has been cut by £15.1 million.

The authority has worked hard to make efficiency savings to try to meet that challenge and has achieved savings of nearly £4 million, but last year's cut was just one too many and schools felt it badly. In looking to next year, my concern is that the Chancellor of the Exchequer will somehow be able to escape from the trap on public spending in which he has put himself. I am filled with dread when I hear him reiterate the Labour party's manifesto commitment to keep the previous Government's public spending controls for the next two years. When one talks to professionals, one realises that the claim that money from the abolition of the assisted places scheme will fill that gap insults their intelligence. More money is needed.

Cuts have been made not only in schools but in further and higher education. In Kingston college, last year's settlement means that 20 teachers—10 per cent. of the staff, in one college, in one year—may face redundancy.

I hope that there is a plan to escape that trap somehow. Liberal Democrats will make no apology for returning to this issue time and again, because it is at the heart of the education debate. Until we have more resources for schools and colleges, sanity will not return to the education system.

If the Government put education at the top of their agenda, as they said they would, we shall be helpful, and make suggestions. In that spirit, as they prepare for the future, I would like to offer them an idea for their welfare-to-work proposals. In my constituency we have Hillcroft college, which presents a unique example of the type of programme that the Government should have in mind.

Hillcroft is the only adult education institution in the country geared solely to the needs of women. Over many years it has helped women who missed out on their first chance of education; women who as single parents are trying to find a path back into the workplace; and women who had previously been dependent on the social security system.

In a recent visit to the college, I was most impressed by the way in which the college supports individual women's needs, as some try to repair some of the self-confidence that was shattered by some of the previous Government's policies. I recommend that Ministers come to my constituency, visit Hillcroft and use it as an example in their deliberations on the Government's welfare-to-work proposals.

In Kingston and Surbiton there is a wealth of examples of policy initiatives that the Government could usefully study—some to follow and some to forget. Kingston university has expanded tremendously over the past few years, and I hope that the proposals in the Dearing report will enable that process to continue.

Unfortunately, many problems have been caused by police cuts in Kingston. In the past two years we have lost more than 40 officers.

The need for a strategic transport policy is one of the subjects of the debate today. In Kingston we certainly have not had such a policy. Moreover, South West Trains has made appalling cuts in services, and the recent infamous cuts have caused many problems for my constituents.

The accident and emergency department in Kingston hospital experiences queues every day of the week. Unfortunately, until there is more capital funding to build a new accident and emergency department there, those problems will continue.

One Kingston policy is highly germane to the debate, and I recommend it to the Government. For the past three years the borough council has pursued the policy of devolution of power to neighbourhoods. The neighbourhood system has been a huge success. In the past, central committee meetings were held at the guildhall, and a few political aficionados used to attend and listen to the debates. There was little participation, and the general public did not know what was going on.

Now, seven neighbourhood committees have been set up round Kingston, which is the smallest borough in London. Many people come to the meetings and

participate, and democracy has flourished in our borough. The efficacy of policy decisions, too, has improved because of the public participation.

The success of the neighbourhood system, that revolution in decentralising power within a borough, has become so famous that many people have come to Kingston to study it. After the first two years of its implementation, the previous Government's district auditor produced a glowing value for money report on it.

The report said:

"Communications between officers and with citizens appear to have improved as a result of the neighbourhood structure",

and

"there is real value in local diversity . . . for many service areas, there is clear justification for delegation to achieve a local focus".

The extra marginal cost was found to be minimal, and the auditor also noted that the royal borough of Kingston operated on staff numbers that were among the lowest for outer London borough councils.

The district auditor was not alone in praising the value of the neighbourhood system. In a recent document entitled "Innovative models of local authority working", the local government management board said:

"Kingston has achieved much and is a good example of clear devolution plans being carefully implemented in a very limited timescale. Its experience is well worth considering and drawing upon."

We have heard today about the powers of the strategic authority and how it will be elected, but I hope that any Green or White Paper will refer also to the inter-relationship between the strategic authority and the borough councils—and between councils themselves, and within councils—so the debate is not just about the strategic authority; it is about all aspects of the future governance of London.

I would like an assurance from the Minister that any future Green or White Paper will allow scope to discuss models of how power can be decentralised within, and to, boroughs. Taking power from the centre to empower communities and citizens was what the neighbourhood system in Kingston was all about. If that is the goal of the Government's proposals for the governance of London, they will be a great success and improve the lives of the people of London. After all, it was the Prime Minister who, in the John Smith memorial lecture on 7 February 1996, said:

"I want to enable local communities to decide more things for themselves through local councils."

I agree, and I hope that the Government's proposals for the future governance of London follow that statement.

1.20 pm

Mr. Anthony Colman (Putney): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am most grateful to you for calling me to make my maiden speech today. I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) on his speech, and I look forward to working with him in south-west London to resolve many of the area's problems, particularly in the health service. I also congratulate my Labour colleagues who have made their maiden speeches today—my hon. Friends the Members for Romford (Mrs. Gordon), for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) and for Hendon (Mr. Dismore).

I have the honour of representing a constituency that has been served in the past by distinguished right hon. Members of Parliament. Hugh Jenkins—now Lord Jenkins of Putney—served as the Member of Parliament for Putney between 1964 and 1979 and, of course, was Arts Minister in the 1970s. He continues to take an interest in the arts and theatre, as does my immediate predecessor, the right hon. and learned David Mellor—a man of many parts—who was a distinguished member of the previous Government. Both men served the people of Putney assiduously, and I hope to do so in as distinguished a way as they did. I wish my immediate predecessor a happy retirement from this House as he pursues his other main interest—which, he assures me, is football.

I would like to bring to the attention of the House four areas of concern to my constituents. Putney, which includes Southfields and Roehampton, is one of the loveliest and greenest constituencies in London. However, there are great worries on the part of my constituents. First, there is high unemployment and deprivation, particularly in the Roehampton area, where unemployment levels are 14 per cent. and higher. One third of the children of Putney live in poverty.

Secondly, many thousands of leaseholders who have bought their properties from Wandsworth council are now crippled by high bills and fearful of what will be done to them next by that council. They have properties that they cannot sell, and they are looking to a Labour Government to help them, because Wandsworth council has not done so.

Thirdly, I wish to refer to health. I remind the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton why he has vast queues at his local accident and emergency unit. On 1 April, the previous Government imposed swingeing cuts at Queen Mary's university hospital, closing acute surgery, orthopaedic, paediatric and maternity units and downgrading its accident and emergency services. The cuts were disgraceful, and were not opposed by Wandsworth council. It is important that the hon. Gentleman, the hon. Members for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) work together to ensure that Queen Mary's university hospital makes a full service available to our constituents.

The fourth matter that I want to bring to the attention of the House is pollution. Traffic pollution is appalling in Putney. Traffic comes roaring down the A3, and hon. Members may be interested to know that Putney bridge is the most used bridge in London: 70,000 vehicles cross it every day, and 10,000 more a day have been using it since the closure of Hammersmith bridge. There are appalling problems of air pollution and we suffer not only from cars but from aircraft noise. I intend to take up cudgels on behalf of my constituents to oppose a fifth terminal at Heathrow.

These issues go beyond one constituency or one borough. They need a Londonwide solution. London groans under quangos and arrangements without responsibility. It is crying out for a strategic elected authority and mayor. For the past two years, I have had the privilege of leading, on behalf of the Association of London Government, the London Agenda 21 initiative, working in partnership with the London Chamber of Commerce International, London First, Age Concern London, Southeast Region Trades Union Congress,

[Mr. Anthony Colman]

National Union of Students London, Black Environmental Network, London Voluntary Services Council and other London boroughs, with the financial support of the Corporation of London.

On 18 June, in time for the United Nations special assembly, the steering group will publish proposals for plans, targets and indicators for London based on the principles of sustainable development, incorporating plans for economic development, social equity and environmental protection.

Who will carry out those plans? Of course the organisations that I have mentioned will work together, but every one of them wants an elected strategic authority. What is missing is that authority, or that mayor, to provide the muscle to put into practice the vision for a sustainable London and to deal with the problems of Putney and all the other London constituencies, on a pan-London basis. I look forward to the referendum in May 1998 and to having the authority and the mayor in place in 2000, ready to implement London's Agenda 21 for the coming century.

I started this maiden speech in time-honoured fashion by talking about my constituency. In a debate on governance it behoves me to remind the House of the Army debates of 1647—350 years ago—held in St. Mary's church, Putney, and chaired by Oliver Cromwell. I shall quote briefly from Thomas Rainborowe, whose words echo down the centuries and are relevant to our debate today.

Thomas Rainborowe, who was the leader of the levellers, said:

"I think that the poorest He that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest He, and . . . that every man that is to live under a Government ought first, by his own consent, to put himself under that Government, and I do think that the poorest man in England is not at all bound in the strict sense to that Government that he hath not had a voice to put himself under."

I believe, in the spirit of the levellers and of Thomas Rainborowe, that a new form of voting—proportional representation—should be used for the election of the mayor and the strategic authority, to ensure the support of the majority of Londoners in any election.

Let Londoners speak in the referendum; let them remove the unelected quangos and the existing fudge of Londonwide bodies; let them, by their consent, put themselves under a strategic, elected Londonwide authority and mayor; and let London be the first truly sustainable capital city in the world.

1.27 pm

Mr. Piers Merchant (Beckenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) on his excellent and mellifluous maiden speech. It is rumoured that he does not need to seek to match the wealth of his predecessor, but if he succeeds in matching his eloquence, he will certainly make his mark on the House. I wish him every success in doing so and look forward to hearing his—no doubt—many contributions to come.

It is sensible for the House to debate from time to time the structure of government in London. After all, London is a huge city with many millions of people and its dynamism means that there is constant change, so it is right to consider from time to time whether the structure of government still matches the need. What may have suited one era, or indeed one area, at one time, may no longer do so. We should proceed with considerable caution. We should adopt the famous adage, attributed both to the Duke of Wellington and to Lord Acton, that when it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change. That was rendered by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) in the vernacular as, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

We must apply two tests to the future of local government in London. First, is there a problem in the existing structure of government that is so severe as to require a major revamp, with all the costs and confusion that that would cause, to put it right? Secondly, if it is accepted as necessary, does the detail of the proposal provide a better structure? To deal with the first question first: to criticise the existing structure is to imply a criticism of the London boroughs. That is effectively saying that the London boroughs are inadequate in handling the local government issues that need to be dealt with for the people of London.

I strongly defend the London boroughs. First, they work effectively, they generally deliver high-quality services, and they are flexible enough to match the very varying needs of different parts of London. Secondly, their size is about optimum. They are not so small as to be inefficient, and they are not so big as to lose their local purpose. A London borough can deal with problems on its patch coherently, and in a way that normally covers a geographically sensible size. They are also small enough to be close to the people whom they seek to represent and govern. They are not too remote and are therefore accountable.

The danger with larger units is that they begin to lose such accountability, locality and directness. Most councillors on London boroughs are sufficiently aware of the whole borough to understand not only the problems and needs of the ward that they represent but those of every other area in the borough. It would be an unusual councillor on a Greater London authority who would be well enough equipped to make good judgments on behalf of other parts of the metropolis.

If one accepts that a Greater London authority is needed, one must consider not only the positive contributions of the boroughs but the negative features of having an extra tier of government. That is what an authority would be, however the light the touch of the proposal. We must take into account the fact that we would immediately have more government and more politicians; more regulations and edicts would flow from the new body. There would also be more costs, which would require more taxation. We would have more bureaucrats and employees.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) said, there is also an automatic instinct for empire building. I remember the beginnings of the metropolitan county councils. I was on Tyneside when Tyne and Wear metropolitan county was set up. I was not in politics then—I was in the disreputable profession of journalism—but I had to sit in on many of the initial committee and full council meetings.

I watched the authority striving for a role. Newly elected members were determined to cut out a political purpose in life. The responsibilities then given to the metropolitan counties were not sufficient to satisfy their

thirst. They therefore started setting up committees to deal with matters that were not part of the original purpose of county councils to justify their existence. From there they moved on to trying to take action on matters that were not part of the council's original purpose. They continually tried to expand the authority of the new county councils. They inevitably clashed with the borough and district councils in their area, so turf wars began.

One of the greatest problems that could emerge if we had a new greater London authority is the battle that would inevitably break out between the new authority, which would try to exert itself and extend its powers, and the boroughs, which would understandably want to hold on to the powers and responsibilities that they have had for many years. I do not believe the assurance that has been given that that will not happen and can be avoided. It is inevitable when two tiers represent one area.

The argument that has been advanced for a greater London authority is the so-called strategic argument: the need to have some form of strategic planning authority. That is merely a soundbite. It sounds good to say to businesses or to people on the doorstep, "Let's have a strategic authority; let's deal with the strategic problems," but the conversation usually ends there. The problem is that, like all soundbites, it lacks substance. What do we mean by "strategic"? That word has developed in the past 20 years: it is common in business and politics, but what does it mean? What will the authority deal with, because I am not convinced that "strategic" has a clear meaning. The word is thrown around in common parlance among politicians and others without most of the people who use it thinking about what it means.

I turned for inspiration to the Labour party. I got hold of a copy of its policy document, "A Voice for London", which gave me many happy hours of reading. I looked to see what was proposed for this strategic authority. It contains a number of headings. Under "Leisure", it gives a description of what leisure involves to initiate those who are not already aware of that. It refers to leisure responsibilities and says:

"It's not intended that they should be returned to the control of the new authority".

So we can rule that out for a start. That is half a page wasted.

Under "Housing", it says:

"We are not proposing that the Greater London Authority should be responsible for providing housing."

So housing is not included. Under "Education and training", it says:

"Provision of schools, colleges and universities will not come under the aegis of the new Greater London Authority."

Under "Health", it says:

"We do not propose, however, that it should control or direct the health service in London."

We are learning a great deal about exactly what it will not be doing. It is very efficient of the Labour party to spend so much time telling us that.

On the police, it refers to partnership approaches at local levels and says:

"We would not want to set back any of these welcome developments. So it has been suggested that the policing function might best be discharged by a board responsible to the Greater London Authority with a majority of members drawn from the authority . . . including nominees from the boroughs and other organisations."

If the Government want a board drawn from the boroughs and other organisations, why do they need to insert another tier?

Similarly, the document refers to the fire brigade and suggests:

"One possible way would be for the Greater London Authority to manage the fire brigade through a board on which both the authority and the boroughs are represented".

My same argument applies.

We are left with only three subjects out of all those for which the greater London authority could be responsible. So more time is spent telling us what it will not do rather than telling us what it will do. One of those subjects is pollution and related issues. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal went into some detail about pollution, and said that it does not recognise borough boundaries. It does not recognise the greater London boundary, either. The best way to deal with pollution is internationally, nationally and locally. To insert a regional tier would complicate rather than assist.

Even the document accepts that, while the Greater London authority would be able to identify problems, action would be taken by the responsible authorities. The Greater London authority would therefore presumably pontificate on matters that are already being dealt with and would not take action. The document reveals that even transport and land use will not be matters for the greater London authority, but will be delegated to others. All that leaves me puzzled about what the so-called strategic authority would be doing. Why do we need to become involved in the complexity and chaos of setting up an extra tier when the majority of the functions are being carried out well?

I am not attempting to suggest that everything in the garden is rosy. I am happy to accept that, while most functions are currently carried out effectively by the London boroughs, not all of them are. I accept that there may be a need to change some of the arrangements for the Greater London area that currently exist. I remain unconvinced that a change as major as that being proposed by the Government is necessary. Small changes in individual areas where there is a problem or insufficient overview could be achieved much more simply through sensible co-operation between the existing elected bodies—namely, the boroughs—and, where necessary, the Government.

I wish to raise a few peripheral points that spring from the general wider argument about whether or not there is a need for a second-tier authority. The first is the strange suggestion that we should have an elected mayor. It is not clear from either the Labour party's policy document or the Government's statements today whether they are keen on it or whether it was a soundbite that was thrown in for good measure and was to be disposed of quickly.

It is clear that many Labour Members do not like the idea. My right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark) summed up their dilemma. If the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) is correct and the post could, owing to the power concentrated in one man, become dangerous, perhaps the title should be—to continue the theme of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea—proconsul. That would reflect the extent of the powers that one man or woman would have in representing an area as large as London. If we used a classical Greek term, perhaps the person should

[Mr. Piers Merchant]

be dubbed the tyrant. Bearing in mind his great knowledge as a historian of the second world war, I am surprised that my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea did not say that the person could be dubbed the gauleiter. Whether or not that idea comes to fruition, it is dangerous.

I welcome the suggestion that the Government's proposals should be put to the people of London via a referendum. I do so for a number of reasons. As a matter of principle I have always been strongly attracted to referendums, both nationally and locally. I know that, in that, I differ from many of my hon. Friends and no doubt from many Labour Members who feel that referendums have no place in parliamentary democracy. But I am convinced that they have a role to play, both in theory and in practice.

I should like to see referendums more widely used, but one must be cautious about them. The nature of the question asked can determine the outcome, so a referendum must be a genuine consultation exercise, not a gesture or a plebiscite designed to try to give a Government the authority to do what they want. If a referendum is to be a genuine consultation exercise, it must be approached with an open mind, the questions must be carefully discussed and a consensus must be reached between those of different views on the fairness of the questions. Sufficient information must be made available so that voters can make a fair judgment.

If the Government are to use a referendum, it is incumbent on them to ensure that the questions are wide in nature, balanced and fair and—crucially—that sufficiently detailed information is made available to the public so that they vote, not just on a vague idea, but with the knowledge of the practical consequences of what is being suggested. The public need to know about matters such as the authority's powers and costs, how it will be financed and whether they will be taxed through it. Only then can the judgment that they make be taken seriously. I repeat that I welcome the idea of a referendum, but it must be carried out properly and carefully.

The Government should not close their mind to the suggestion made by some Conservative Members that, if a referendum is to be held, it should be extended to the boroughs in their strict geographical definition so as to allow individuals who live in boroughs within what is defined as Greater London to decide, borough by borough, whether they wish to participate in the proposed scheme. If we really want to reflect what ordinary people want, they should in fairness be given that choice, either as part of the main referendum or in a separate referendum, and always retain the right to opt in if they change their minds at some future date.

My final point relates to the question of boundaries—a matter touched on by the Minister and which is dealt with in greater detail in the Labour party's policy document. It states:

"There is no clear single natural boundary for Greater London."

That is a truism. The policy paper went on to suggest three options, but appeared to rule out two of them, as did the Government earlier today. I urge the Government not to take a rigid view on London's boundaries and to keep an open mind about changes. If they wish to institute a Greater London authority, they should consider other ways of establishing boundaries, for example, so that it covers the area along the Thames as a river-based authority, or includes only the inner London area. The Government should not simply throw out those ideas.

My reason for urging that is obvious: I represent an outer London borough, and while I do not suggest that there is anything particularly sacrosanct about such boroughs, I must point out that the borough I represent differs greatly from many other parts of London—especially central London—and has different needs and priorities. It might well be that the people of my constituency would be better served by being outside a Greater London authority's coverage, although I am prepared to be convinced that that would not hold true for other parts of London.

The hon. Member for Brent, East spoke of London as a great urban mass, but that is not how much of Bromley looks. Were a Martian to land in the southern part of my constituency, it would see green fields, woodlands and farms. If it were then told that it was in the middle of a metropolis, it would be convinced that Earthmen were completely mad. That is also true of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam).

If the people of Biggin Hill were asked whether they lived in London, I suspect that their answer would be no. Similarly, if one went to what is known as the village of Hayes in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), one would find people who did not think that they lived in London but regarded themselves as living in a village. Indeed, the people who live in Hayes can walk down to the bottom of many of its streets and see green fields and open land.

For all those reasons, and because the consciousness of the people who live in the London borough of Bromley is, for the most part, not that of Londoners but of Kentish people—indeed, local people fought strongly for Kent to remain the postal line—it is important to look at where boundaries run. We must take into account not only the common interests of London, as the Government seek to do, but the important diversity of London, which is one of the city's strengths and which would be lost if an attempt were made to take it in a single centrally planned direction.

1.49 pm

Ms Linda Perham (Ilford, North): I am very grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this debate, especially as I am London-born and represent a London constituency. I congratulate the other hon. Members who have managed to catch your eye during the debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to give their maiden speeches.

I pay tribute to my two Conservative predecessors in the old Ilford, North constituency, the most recent of whom, Mr. Vivian Bendall, gave service to the people of my area for 19 years. The other, Mr. Tom Iremonger, served a similar length of time, from 1954 to 1973.

As one of the 101 Labour woman Members elected to this Parliament, I feel that I am following a happy tradition, in that both previous Labour Members for Ilford, North have been women who won seats from the Conservatives, and both had distinguished records of public service.

Mabel Ridealgh, who entered the House at that other landslide election in 1945, was a national representative of the Co-operative Women's Guild and a member of the National Council for Social Service and the citizens advice bureau.

Millie Miller won her seat at the October 1974 general election and, by the time of her premature death in 1977, had become an extremely popular and well-loved Member of Parliament in the House and the constituency. She was the first Labour woman to lead a London borough, Camden, from 1971 to 1973. She was also a former mayor of that borough and of Stoke Newington. I am following in her footsteps in more ways than one, in that in May 1994, when Labour took minority control of the London borough of Redbridge for the first time in 30 years, I was elected as the first woman Labour mayor of that council and the first Labour mayor for 26 years.

Such is the respect and affection accorded to Millie Miller nearly 20 years after her death that an annual memorial lecture is still held in the constituency. Over the years, several of my right hon. and hon. Friends have paid tribute to her memory by delivering that lecture, including my right hon. Friends the Members for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and for Livingston (Mr. Cook), my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) and the late, much-missed former Member for Barking, champion of women's rights, Jo Richardson.

It is my particular privilege to represent the area where I have lived for nearly a quarter of a century. I only ever wanted to stand for Ilford, North and when I was selected, 18 months ago, it seemed almost an impossible dream, as the notional Conservative majority in the new constituency was more than 14,000. Indeed, as recently as February of this year, the BBC political research unit listed Ilford, North as "Conservative—very safe" and predicted that my predecessor, Mr. Bendall, had

"the assurance of a continued presence in the Commons"

and that his position seemed

"secure indeed."

It was also my aim to become a Member of Parliament before I was 50—an ambition now fulfilled with only a few weeks to spare, as I reach my half century on 29 June.

As well as including the northern part of Ilford in the London borough of Redbridge, the new Ilford, North constituency incorporates parts of Woodford formerly in the old Wanstead and Woodford seat, represented in the past by such distinguished gentlemen as our great wartime Prime Minister, Winston Churchill; Patrick Jenkin, now the right hon. Lord Jenkin of Roding; and the new hon. Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), who found another seat. They all gave long and valued service to that constituency.

Ilford, North, bordering on Essex and rising from part of the ancient great forest of Essex, enjoys the advantages of its situation in a London borough, with access to the centre, but also has the benefits of a pleasant environment, with two country parks and other open green space within easy distance.

Among other things, my constituency is famous for being home to a large number of licensed London taxi drivers. The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) told a story about taxi drivers knowing the passenger's address. A lot of them know my address and know where I live because it is in the constituency. A considerable number of them are from the Jewish community. Ilford, North has one of the largest Jewish populations in western Europe.

Indeed, my first meeting with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was at the annual meeting of Jewish Care in November 1994, during my mayoral year. The warmth of his reception as the keynote speaker on that occasion showed me that Labour values were striking a chord with the Jewish community: family and community values, support for the individual within the community, the right of everyone to justice, freedom and opportunity, and the duty to act as responsible members of society.

In a letter to the Board of Deputies of British Jews before the general election, the Prime Minister wrote:

"The British Jewish community has made an immense contribution to our country. So many areas of our national life have been enriched and strengthened by the outstanding efforts of its members—in all areas of the arts, in our intellectual life and scientific achievement, in business life and wealth creation, in education, public service and politics, and in the spiritual life of our nation."

I am proud to represent this community in London and all the diverse groups that have made their homes in the constituency. As a Londoner, it is my special pleasure to have been elected as a supporter of a new Labour Government committed to restoring a voice for London, with a Londonwide, democratically elected authority—if supported in a referendum.

It was my good fortune some 25 years ago to work for the genuinely popular Greater London Council in the research library, now part of the London research centre. I pay tribute to the work of the staff of the research library and its successor—members and officers who have served the people of London over the years. In the early 1970s, the research library was part of the Department of Planning and Transportation, and it is obvious to me from my experience of working in that sphere, and from representing a constituency with eight Central line stations—and hence a large number of Underground commuters—that a strategic authority for London is desperately needed, particularly for planning and transportation matters.

The people of Ilford, North expect a Labour Government and an accountable London authority to improve their lives, restore respect for London and Londoners and renew London as a proud city of Europe and the world, reinvigorated and ready to play its full role in the new millennium as a worthy capital of this great country.

1.57 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Today, we have heard six and a half maiden speeches. The hon. Members for Romford (Mrs. Gordon), for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and for Ilford, North (Ms Perham) all made generous comments about their predecessors. I envy the hon. Member for Ilford, North for managing to get the seat that she always wanted. Many of us have been desperate to represent particular seats, but it never worked out that way. I also congratulate her on her honesty about her age—perhaps that is a sign of new Labour.

The hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), who is not in the Chamber at the moment, paid a semi-generous tribute to his predecessor, whereas the hon. Member for

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Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) paid his predecessor a distinctly ungenerous tribute, in language which I believe he will come to regret. Moreover, I am sure that his trenchant views on the future of London will have been noted by the Whips—as one would expect of new Labour.

Conservative Members have appreciated the tributes paid to Michael Neubert, John Gorst, John Marshall, Dick Tracey, Norman Lamont, David Mellor and Vivian Bendall. My party has recently had a traumatic experience, and we shall miss them all.

I do not know whether it is fair to call a speech by a retread a maiden speech, but we were all pleased by the return of my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark). We revelled in his description of Kensington and Chelsea as an inner-city area—he is back with all the style for which he is famed. I am sure that we all welcome him back to the House.

London is a success, and it is a Conservative success.

Mr. Raynsford: Rubbish.

Mr. Ottaway: The Minister has only to look at the opening words of his London manifesto, which states that London is one of the world's greatest cities. The Conservative party made it one of the world's greatest cities.

London is one of the most important commercial centres of the world. It has the largest foreign exchange markets and the leading shipping market, it straddles the time zone and speaks the universal language of commerce. London's economy is equal to that of many nations.

London is a financial capital. Each day in London more franc transactions are carried out than in Paris, and more German mark transactions are carried out than in Frankfurt. It is a capital city built not only on our historic financial institutions, but on tourism, fashion and the arts, for London is a cultural city as well. It is a magnet for Europeans who come to enjoy our restaurants, theatres and galleries and our heritage. All those people are in London to have a good time. It is no surprise that, for the first time since the 1960s, London in the 1990s is again regarded, according to a poll by *Newsweek*, as

"the coolest city on the planet".

In London, the cultural heritage of our nation meets the challenge of enterprise head on. We may have 20 museums, two opera houses and five orchestras, but we also have the most up-to-date technology and six competing fibre-optic networks. Countless European companies have chosen to locate their headquarters in London. They are keen to have a share of the most advantageous marketplace in the world.

That mixture of culture and business makes London the most exciting place on earth. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) quoted Dr. Johnson's saying:

"When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life".

In the fine borough of Croydon, I am proud to represent a part of London.

London's success did not happen by chance: the Conservative Government made it happen. It is a Conservative success and we are entitled to take the credit for it. Whatever Labour Members may say, they cannot deny that they opposed most of the key decisions that led London to be the success that it is today.

The Government's contribution to the debate so far is the paper entitled "A Voice for London", which was published last year. The entire tone of that document was given to knocking London, exaggerating problems that exist and conjuring up some that do not. Yet again, the Labour party was playing politics and performing for the focus groups, when jobs, inward investment and the future of our capital were at stake.

Anything that has enabled London to thrive has been done in spite of the Labour party, which has nit-picked, found problems and talked London down. Now that Labour is in government, it proposes so-called solutions, which we shall criticise in a constructive manner. One thing that Labour cannot deny, however, is the success of our policies, which helped London to turn itself around.

London and the United Kingdom are a target for inward investment. Companies from around the world have located their headquarters in London, not just because they are attracted to our working practices and our good industrial relations, but above all because they find their own countries uncompetitive. It is no surprise that the UK is now the only European Union country in the top 10 of the world competitiveness league. For example, a German firm based in Frankfurt would pay twice the cost for a telephone call that it would pay in London. Its work force is rigid and expensive to hire. What is the Government's response? They sign up for the minimum wage and the social chapter.

Over the past 18 years, we have worked to build on London's strengths, not to undermine them. We encouraged the development of a cultural partnership between London's key players. Central Government, elected local government, business and the community are now working together to make London a success in a way that would have been inconceivable under the old GLC. That approach has been duplicated at a local level right across the capital. Public and private sector partnerships are being set up to promote and regenerate the local communities.

Docklands must be one of the largest and most successful regeneration projects anywhere in the world. The Conservative Government managed the development by removing sites from Labour local authorities that had failed to recognise the area's potential. Like a phoenix rising from the ashes, redevelopment began. The results are remarkable. The number of people employed in the area has more than doubled. There is new transport infrastructure, new housing and new leisure sites.

There were problems and delays. After all, many said that the project could not be achieved. Conservatives, however, were determined that it would be. We would not stand by and see the potential of the area and its inhabitants overlooked.

Greenwich was not included. In 1979, when the land was taken from the control of the local authorities, the Greenwich peninsula, so jealously guarded by the local authority, was left untouched. Nothing happened, and that was Labour's contribution.

Mr. Raynsford: British Gas.

Mr. Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman says "British Gas." What efforts did Greenwich council make to enter into a

partnership to develop the site? It took a Conservative Government to take the site and provide the initiative. An important lesson to learn is that it is not sufficient merely to talk of a new beginning. Commitment and, above all, action provide the foundation for improvement.

Mr. Raynsford: Will the hon. Gentleman, for the record, consider the fact that it was the Labour-controlled Greenwich council that gave planning permission to British Gas for a comprehensive development of the peninsula in the early 1990s, a development which British Gas failed to carry forward? Responsibility for the non-development of the site rests with British Gas.

As the hon. Gentleman appears to be approaching these issues through blue-tinted spectacles, will he reflect and give us his verdict on why the electorate of London, if it felt that everything was so rosy in its city, chose to eject the Conservative party so decisively in the general election?

Mr. Ottaway: The hon. Gentleman talks about action on the Greenwich peninsula. For 10 years, throughout the 1980s, nothing happened.

Mr. Raynsford: Planning permission.

Mr. Ottaway: Planning permission was given in the 1990s, when we had to take things over. Throughout the 1980s, the Labour party did nothing while the Conservative party regenerated the east end of London in a way that was not matched even by the Labour party's wildest dreams.

Mr. Gummer: Perhaps my hon. Friend would care to contrast yet again the difference between the areas that were run by the Docklands commission and those outside its remit, which were run by London's Labour local authorities, including Greenwich. During the 1980s, the commission re-created London, while Greenwich was left almost derelict by a local authority whose politics got in the way of regeneration.

Mr. Ottaway: My right hon. Friend makes exactly my point with force and with all his skill in, and experience of, local government.

Mr. McDonnell: It is money.

Mr. Ottaway: That is the very point. If a Cabinet Minister represents London and the wider strategic area, there will be results. A strategic authority that has no representation in government will not achieve anything.

The Government have proposed a strategic authority and a mayor. As my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) said, the strategic authority will have no worthwhile powers. The Government's approach is hidden in bureaucratic gobbledegook. The new authority would "help raise funds". We are told that it will "promote strategies". It seems that it will be involved in "identifying housing need". It will keep an eye on health provision. We are told that it will advise and encourage the "providers of education". It will be able to have an influence on the "provision of leisure facilities". In other words, it will have no power. It will be nothing but a talking shop.

The aim of an elected mayor or authority, if we are to have one or the other, should be to create an executive with serious clout. If we have an authority and a mayor, we want to see success. In other words, we shall want the system to work. It will need powers, if it is to achieve anything, to plan, tax and spend. It seems, however, that it will have none of those powers.

Mr. Raynsford: Yes, it will.

Mr. Ottaway: Well, we look forward with interest to seeing how those developments progress.

Labour's London mayor will have a mandate, but he will not have much power. His base will be the proposed new London authority, but it will not provide the main services. They will be provided by local councils, so the real power will still lie with the 32 London boroughs and non-elected officials of central Government. In short, the new mayor will be nothing other than a ribbon cutter. As my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) has said, it is a recipe for instability.

The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) used the GLC, rightly or wrongly, as the political base for his views rather than as a provider of services. Given that the new proposed authority will have even less power than the GLC, the new mayor will be sorely tempted to play the same game. The old GLC had a budget of more than £1 billion and 20,000 staff, yet, today, it is hard to find anything that it did which needed doing. The only thing that a new Greater London authority will create as it thrashes around trying to find a role for itself is more jobs for bureaucrats. They will be funded by Londoners, who will be penalised for living in London.

The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill) said that no new taxation would be imposed as a result of the proposal. I challenged him on that in an intervention and referred to the Labour Government document "A Voice for London". It refers to the type of elections that may be held and says of the new authority

> "This might not be appropriate in the case of an authority with limited spending and tax raising powers."

I looked at the Under–Secretary as his hon. Friend said that to see whether he agreed or disagreed. I thought that his response was a rather neutral, if not negative, one. I look forward with interest to the reply from the Under–Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson). I hope that she will clarify exactly what is meant by tax-raising powers. Who is right? Is it the hon. Member for Streatham or the Labour Government document?

A voice for London sounds great in principle, but will it give London the voice that it had in the early 1980s? Then, the GLC spoke out on foreign policy, nuclear disarmament and police matters, all of which had absolutely nothing to do with it. It ended up as a middleman, fighting everyone. Indeed, it fought its biggest campaign against its own abolition. About £3 million of Londoners' money was spent on that, which may have explained the 102 per cent. rates rise in the last year of its existence—some voice.

How do the Labour Government hope to carry London with them when they cannot even sell the policy to their own colleagues in local government? As the hon. Member

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for Brent, East said, the boroughs do not agree with the proposal. The Members representing London do not agree with it, and now more than half of the Labour council leaders do not support the proposal. Some have even gone further and publicly attacked it as lunacy.

The Labour leader of Barking and Dagenham, Mr. Brooker, has declared the plans for an elected mayor as nothing but a gimmick. I wonder whether the hon. Lady will clarify exactly how much that gimmick will cost. Perhaps she should also consult her colleague, the Labour leader of Merton council, now the hon. Member for Putney, who made his maiden speech today. In a newspaper article he wrote:

"I have been to cities in the US with a directly elected mayor and seen the distress it causes. The leader of the assembly and the mayor are continually fighting."

Mr. Brooker, the leader of Barking and Dagenham, has said:

"The whole point of a new strategic authority for London was to give power back to elected members. This would take it away. It would be a retrograde step for democracy. Just imagine if someone like Dame Shirley Porter got the job."

Mr. Brooker obviously does not share the view of the majority of the electorate of Westminster that Shirley Porter did a superb job for Westminster. *[Laughter.]* Labour Members may laugh, but Dame Shirley was continually re-elected.

Mr. Dismore *rose—*

Mr. Ottaway: No, I do not have time to give way.

Imagine that one had Dame Shirley leading a local authority and the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage, the hon. the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) as the mayor for London. The clash and conflict would be nothing but a recipe for disaster. If both the new authority and the mayor have power, political differences would mean gridlock. The relationship between elected mayor and new strategic authority is a particular aspect that we shall watch closely.

It is very early days on this subject and there are many things for all parties to consider. We shall look at the Government's proposals for London in—as on any issue—a constructive manner. Where we think that they are right, we shall agree with them. When we think that they are wrong, we shall oppose them. We do not believe that Labour needs further bureaucracy when so many successful partnerships are bearing fruit but, in view of the lobby fodder opposite, we have little choice but to sit back and watch from the wings.

There will, I believe, come a time when the new Government realise the folly of their plans. I can only restate my party's belief that London and Londoners should not, yet again, pay the price.

2.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): It is little wonder that the people of London so resoundingly rejected the Conservative party when the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman dubs as "lobby fodder" the representatives whom the people of London returned to the House. There could be no greater example of the overweening contempt for London and Londoners of the previous Administration, and again today by Opposition Front Benchers. They have an absolute unwillingness to accept that the people of London should have a direct voice in the affairs that govern their lives.

All debates in the House are important, for those who are fortunate to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, give voice to those whom we are sent here to serve—the people. That is what this morning's debate was most centrally concerned with: not in this instance giving, but rather restoring to London the democratic voice that is heard in every other city in the land through a directly elected authority—an authority chosen by the people, accountable to the people and entrusted with the duty to give practical and realisable form to the aspirations of the people for their city.

Alone among the cities in this kingdom—almost alone among the capitals of the world—London and Londoners have, for far too long, been without that precious link in the chain that joins neighbourhood to community, community to city and city to country. The Government are committed to reforging that link by the creation of a Greater London authority and a directly elected mayor, if that be the will of Londoners.

This has been an important debate, with varied and valuable contributions from hon. Members on both sides of the House, save for the lamentable and empty arguments from the Opposition Front Bench. All other speeches approached the debate with great seriousness, genuine inquiry and—we believe, given what we are attempting to do—genuinely helpful criticism. The right hon. Member for the Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), and the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mr. Merchant) all brought to the debate not only their inimitable and individual styles, but a great wealth of experience in the governance of London over many years, and, as was clear from their speeches, a genuine, clear commitment to the interests of London and Londoners.

There have been a wide range of suggestions concerning the form that the authority should take, what it should do and how it should do it. Some proposals from hon. Members go further than others. All will be considered, as will the views of Londoners and London organisations. I do not want to pre-empt what will be a major and wide-ranging consultation exercise, but I assure hon. Members that their views will be taken into account when drafting our consultation paper.

The consultation paper will be based on the principles that we have already defined. The new authority—that is, the mayor and the assembly together—will provide strategic leadership. They will not take responsibility for the delivery of day-to-day services but will ensure effective public scrutiny of the publicly funded pan-London bodies. The new authority's structure will not only minimise opportunities for conflict, but actively encourage co-operation and partnership. The overall impact on public expenditure should be neutral with set-up costs paid for by subsequent savings in the short to medium term.

The new authority will be efficient and effective, with strong leadership able to get things done. We seek to create not the GLC mark II, much as some hon. Members

might mourn that fact, but a new form of strategic local government, streamlined in structure, focused, strongly led and capable of continuing and continuous achievement. At the heart of our approach will be our commitment to good government and local decision-making. In establishing a new authority, our purpose is not merely to make better bureaucracies, beneficial though that would be, but to introduce the democratic voice of London, thus serving to reinvigorate local government and to clarify and facilitate the process of solving London-wide problems.

In my area of responsibility, the opportunities for improving the quality of public transport services and co-ordination between transport planners, providers and users are enormous. It is hard to believe, for example, that bus operators are not directly involved in the planning and implementation of bus lanes; that, however, is true. It is hard to believe that the work of the traffic control systems unit, which manages the vital traffic signals on all London roads, is based in the City of London, funded by the Government office for London and supervised by a management board with Highways Agency and borough representatives, but again it is true. Then there is the supposed co-ordination of the London lorry ban, of air quality information and of parking policies. I could go on, but time is short.

That is the legacy that we have inherited and are committed to tackling. We are making a start, but one of the new strategic authority's key priorities will be the development and implementation of a truly integrated London transport policy, for which the people of this great city have been asking for years and which this Government are committed to deliver.

Over the years, we have become used to the Conservative party arguing against a strategic authority for London. It invariably raises the spectre of additional costs and who will pay for them, conveniently ignoring the enormous potential for reducing costs for businesses, commuters, residents—in effect, London—from an integrated transport strategy that delivers better public transport and improved journey times.

Londoners understand that those benefits outweigh any costs associated with setting up and running a slimline strategic authority. It cannot be that the case is too complex for Opposition Front Benchers to comprehend. Therefore, the rejection of the facts is yet another example of the ideological time warp in which, like flies in amber, they are trapped.

Moreover, the new authority will have oversight of many public services. There will be economies of scale arising from better co-ordination and simplified bureaucratic structures. That will mean not less money for front-line services, but economic, efficient bureaucracy. We have made it clear that the cost of running the new authority will be met within existing public spending limits, as my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), in his fine contribution—as his contributions invariably are—eloquently detailed.

There have also been arguments that policy co-ordination in the capital is better done by central than by local government. The experience of Londoners over the past few years fails to support that line of argument. If everything is left to Ministers, London inevitably takes second place and the results are here for everyone to see. Londoners are best placed to run London. Elected Londoners will do it even better.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who has responsibility for London, referred to the fact that a number of people, some strongly linked with the previous Government, are now so converted to the idea of a strategic authority that they are already making public statements to the effect that they propose to stand for mayor. We are greatly encouraged by that damascene conversion. Londoners will give their view through the ballot box.

I cannot agree with the argument that London can do without a mayor or an assembly. Our manifesto made it clear that we are offering Londoners a strategic authority made up of an elected assembly and an elected mayor. That is the proposition. That is what Londoners will be asked to vote on. It is as simple and straightforward as that.

The purpose of the office of mayor is to provide a single individual with whom the electorate can identify, and whom it can hold accountable. It will provide a human face for what might otherwise be yet another faceless bureaucracy. By having been elected, the mayor will have the clear support of the people of London in what he or she does. At all costs, we must avoid appointing leaders who come to power as a result of some secret deal in a smoky back room. The fact that the mayor will have been elected will add to his or her status rather than weaken it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) expressed concern on that subject in his own inimitable way. Concerns have been voiced that the establishment of a powerful mayor for London could lead to problems of corruption. Inevitably, to be effective, the mayor must be a powerful individual with a strong public mandate. However, the mayoralty will be matched by a powerful elected assembly to hold the office to public account.

We are committed to establishing a mayor and an assembly to work together for the good of London. We are also eager to establish a system of checks and balances to ensure that both are publicly accountable for all that they do.

The proposed GLA offers an opportunity for a new form of local government, and the many detailed contributions from both sides of the House on its structure, membership, size and composition, as well as on the means of election to it, show that the proposal has clearly not only stimulated consideration on the practicalities, but fired the imagination in presenting the prospect of the first London government of the 21st century.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell), in his maiden speech, referred to county hall, to which many people have a strong attachment. However, a suitable location for a new authority and mayor must be carefully considered, and all options will be examined to ensure that London gets the best possible value for money.

As I have said, this has been an excellent debate in the main, not least because of the notable contributions made by hon. Members engaged in that most frightening of experiences, the delivery of one's maiden speech. My hon. Friends the Members for Romford (Mrs. Gordon), for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), for Putney (Mr. Colman) and

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

for Ilford, North (Ms Perham) all made valuable and interesting contributions, as did the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey).

The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) referred to the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Clark), and I share his perplexity as to whether the word "maiden" can be considered an accurate definition of the right hon. Gentleman's contribution. I was tempted to add the word "aunt", to make the description "maiden aunt", but that sounded somewhat pejorative, so I shall leave it as it is and consider it afresh.

I want to stress the fact that, although the Government have mapped out the basic principles that will define the size, shape and role of the new authority, when we say that we shall consult extensively on the details, that is precisely and accurately what we mean. Many of today's contributions have helped to clarify the directions in which we should explore, and individual contributions are valuable bases on which to build in the future.

We are determined to establish a new authority that has the support of the people of London, is relevant to their needs and does not reflect sectional interests. We shall provide an elected assembly and an elected mayor to work together to tackle the problems facing the capital and to promote the city at home and abroad. Together, they will maintain London's leading position in the world and ensure its sustainable development into the next century. That is what we have promised to do, and that is what we shall do.

Mr. Jim Dowd (Lord Commissioner to the Treasury): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Monday 9th June, Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the European Union, and the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on that Motion not later than Ten o'clock.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Resolved,

That Mr. Alastair Goodlad and Mr. Archy Kirkwood be appointed members of the House of Commons Commission under the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Resolved,

That Mr. Denzil Davies and Dr. Lewis Moonie be discharged from the Public Accounts Commission and that Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Mr. Austin Mitchell, Mr. William O'Brien, Mr. Robert Sheldon, Mr. Andrew Tyrie, and Mr. Alan Williams be appointed other members of the Public Accounts Commission under Section 2(1)(c) of the National Audit Act 1983.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Bed Blocking (Essex)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): The issue of bed blocking is of importance not only to my constituents and to the county of Essex, but to the country as a whole, and I hope that I will be able to deploy a number of arguments and elicit solutions from the new Government. Before getting into my argument, it would be churlish of me not to welcome the new Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to his position. He and I have nothing in common politically and will disagree completely on political matters, but that does not prevent me from wishing him well and hoping that he is a great success.

Like many other hon. Members, I received a letter from the new Secretary of State in which he described the responsibilities of the five new Ministers, and I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his courtesy. I am told that the Government are committed to doing all they can to promote public health. On that, there can be no disagreement—that is what the previous Government did for 18 years. We are told that the new Government will end the internal market in the NHS and will reduce waiting lists. My colleagues and I will watch carefully during this Parliament to see exactly what happens to waiting lists.

The first thing that surprises me is that, for the first time in my 14 years here, we have three Ministers of State. Why was that felt necessary, at extra cost to the public purse? Were not the previous Government criticised on many financial matters concerning the health service?

We also find that an overwhelming number of those Ministers come from London. I am a Londoner, and I am proud to be a Londoner, but anyone who knows anything about the health service will understand that many of the controversies in the service have concerned London issues, such as the city's hospitals. I hope that colleagues throughout the country will reflect on the appointment of so many Ministers in the Department of Health who represent London constituencies. Perhaps I am being harsh, but we will judge them by their actions. On both counts, I have put down initial markers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): Get on with it, David.

Mr. Amess: I will not accept orders from the new Minister and I will deploy my arguments in my own way.

There is a huge divide between the Conservative party and the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties on the management of the national health service, but I am very proud of the achievements of the previous Government during their 18 years in office. Anyone who wants to judge the success of the health service should look at the increased life expectancy of women and men. *[Interruption.]* The Minister gasps, but I think that that is very important. Women and men are living longer, and are not dying from diseases that people used to die from. Many new treatments are available. Babies can be saved at an earlier stage, as early as 22 and a half weeks—but unfortunately the majority of hon. Members do not recognise that fact when it comes to abortion.

By and large, the general public are much healthier than ever. As hon. Members go round schools, they can see that the children are much taller and healthier. Do the previous Government deserve the credit for that? I do not know, but I know that in the 14 years for which I have been a Member of Parliament we have heard constant criticism from Labour and the Liberal Democrats about the health service.

Civil servants supply briefs to Ministers—it was not so long ago that we had a debate on bed blocking and we do not have the time in this debate to refer to what was said then—but I hope that, when I have pointed the finger at one or two areas, the Minister, who may point the finger back at one or two other areas, will consider what my constituents and many others are concerned about.

My constituency ranks 31st out of 659 in the number of senior citizens. I got that statistic from Age Concern. We have an ever-increasing aging population. There are many private nursing homes in my constituency—almost into three figures—and in the past few months I have tried to visit as many of them as possible. They are homes in the real sense of the word. They are not institutions and do not have the general atmosphere of a hospital, which obviously deals with a large number of people. I salute the women and men who run those homes.

When Essex county council was controlled by the Conservative party, we delivered care in the community and looked after the elderly people to the best of our ability, but all that changed when control changed hands. After the elections on 1 May, the Conservative party became the biggest group; before that, the Liberal party was the largest, followed by the Labour party.

Mr. Bob Russell (Colchester): The other way round.

Mr. Amess: Yes, the other way round: the Labour party was just ahead of the Liberal party and they shared power. As I understand it, that is still the situation, but, because Southend and Thurrock will leave Essex county council when they become unitary authorities next spring, the county council will become Conservative-controlled again, without an election. I hope that we will return to the Conservative policy on elderly people.

My constituents love their relatives. We could argue about whether everyone should or can look after their relatives in their own homes—those are profound arguments—but the fact is that many people are concerned about the circumstances of their aunts, uncles and other relatives.

A serious situation exists in Southend, West, in Essex and in the country, known as bed blocking, which is, quite simply, people who should be in residential or nursing homes occupying beds in hospitals. If it is all about money, let us have some answers from the Minister. In 1979, the national health service was on its knees. We need not go on about that this afternoon, but it was in a terrible state, as was our economy.

No one could possibly claim that the state of the national health service and the British economy in any way mirrors what it was in 1979. The economy is far healthier, although unfortunately today we have heard the damaging news that interest rates have been put up by a further 0.25 per cent. Many people will be distressed about that.

The leader of the Conservatives on Essex county council wrote to me about the latest figures on bed blocking. He enclosed a cutting about which I know the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) will be concerned because it deals with the problem in Colchester. The *Evening Gazette* of 27 May says:

> "Up to 100 patients are being denied hospital beds because social services is dragging its heels, a health chief has claimed.
>
> Social services needs to help discharge certain patients. But they have been accused of being too slow and as a result, hospital beds are effectively being blocked."

The Conservative group's opinion is that, because of the policy of the Liberal and Labour parties over the past four years, there is a 50 per cent. over-provision of care home beds in the county. They have continued to fill publicly owned homes rather than biting the bullet and dealing with the situation.

I have to confess that I no longer understand the Labour party. I do not understand what the British people decided to do on 1 May. The things that the leader of the Labour party said when he and I were first elected, and what he has said today seem to be completely different messages. If private capital and private nursing homes are no longer a problem for the Labour party, why are they still a problem for Essex county council? A huge capacity is not being used and we have the terrible situation of bed blocking.

County-owned homes are £200 a week more expensive than homes that can be provided in the independent sector. In even the best case, the cost is more than £50 a week extra in public homes. That is a huge difference. Over the past four years, Essex county council has bled the capital programme dry. It has spent £6 million on refurbishments.

A home in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Dr. Clark) received a £330,000 quotation to upgrade its property by means of lease transfer. The developer would then have had the income from the beds that the county would have purchased, usually over a period of 21 years. Instead of taking that route, the council carried out a refurbishment that cost in the region of £1.5 million. That is an absolute disgrace. I could go on and on and on about the money that is being wasted by the Labour and Liberal parties on Essex county council.

I do not want the Minister to deploy any arguments about capping and the way in which funds have been used in respect of Essex county council. Frankly, the council has the money to fund the elderly people. According to the latest information that I have from the hospital, 62 beds are blocked in Southend hospital with another three pending; 90 per cent. of those cases are awaiting funding from social services for long-term care or community-care packages. Half the surgical ward is blocked with medically fit people awaiting discharge, and new intake has been completely stopped. By September, it is expected that three wards will be blocked.

The Minister has the opportunity to put right all the things that he and his colleagues perceived that we Conservatives had been doing wrong. Of course, as the Labour and Liberal parties are in bed together locally, no doubt they will be able to persuade each other to release these much-needed funds.

[Mr. Amess]

People are waiting for care even though more than 600 bed vacancies are listed in the south of the county. Approximately 380 of those beds are in Southend. I warmly pay tribute to the sterling work of the South Essex Care Homes Association. I have met many of its members, and its homes are of a very high quality. I have spoken to many of the relatives who are delighted with the care and attention that patients receive.

There is unfair competition between in-house and independent homes. The cost to the private payer is £370 a week, whereas the contract price for the private and voluntary sector in Southend is £233 a week. The county council is the provider, the purchaser, the paymaster—under the reorganisation of the health team—the contract organiser, the inspector and the regulator. The South Essex Care Homes Association thinks that that is unsatisfactory.

I pay tribute to the former Secretary of State's White Paper, which tackled those problems. I hope that the Minister, when he reads himself into his new brief, will reflect on whether he and his colleagues agree with any of the points made in that document.

I could raise many important issues, but I am a fair individual and I believe in splitting the time between the Government and the Opposition to allow the Minister to respond to all the points raised. I said at the outset that the Minister and I would not agree on anything politically, but I ask him to consider certain matters.

Last week, I visited many of the 26 people in Runwell hospital who are in psychiatric wards. I pay tribute to Mrs. Sheila Taylor, the chairman of the trust, who has done an excellent job. I have met many members of staff and many of the patients. Beds are being blocked in two areas. In contrast to that are the vacancies in the beautiful homes in my constituency. Many of those people could go into those homes: staff are available and the quality of care is first class. I am not saying anything against Runwell hospital or Southend hospital, where the staff do a magnificent job. The homes run a different operation from the hospitals.

I want to know from the Minister what I should say to relatives who write to me. Do I say that the new Government think that the problem is due to a lack of funds and is the fault of the previous Conservative Government? I am sure that the Minister does not intend to say that; I simply suggest that I cannot tell them that. Can I tell them that the new Government recognise that there is a problem, that Rome was not built in a day and that, as we have entered the promised land, anything and everything is possible? There may be changes to the arrangements that Essex county council has entered into for the homes in their ownership and private homes.

Those people's life spans may be limited. Their relatives believe that for them every day is precious. They have no time for Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat politicians to argue with one another. I ask for some straight speaking, which I know I will get from the Minister. Can the problem be solved fairly quickly, or is it intractable because of the changing pattern of the United Kingdom population? All I ask is that the Minister does his best to give some hope to the loved ones of the people in those hospitals—hope that they will be transferred elsewhere as soon as possible.

2.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) for raising this topic and for allowing the House to consider the subject of bed blocking in its wider context as well as in relation to his constituency. He asked for plain speaking and he will get it.

The hon. Gentleman asked what he should say to the relatives of those who find themselves in this unenviable position. He should begin by saying sorry. He should say, "We are sorry that for 18 years we got it wrong and neglected the issues. We are sorry that you have had to wait so long for a Labour Government to begin to address the problem."

I am sorry that I had to begin my speech in that way because, when I was first made aware that we were to have a debate about bed blocking in Essex, I had hoped that it would be possible to approach the matter in a non-party political way. I am not in the slightest bit interested in scoring party political points over the issue of bed blocking. We need to move forward and look to the future, not the past—that is the theme of this new Labour Government.

I was therefore sorry that the hon. Gentleman, in his inimitable fashion, having cast a few kind personal words towards me, immediately began to castigate the new Government on their size. The Government are smaller than the Conservative Government who preceded them. There are fewer Ministers in this Government than there were in the Conservative Government, yet the hon. Gentleman had the nerve to call us the party of big government. The reverse is true: we are a small and more efficient bunch than they ever were.

The hon. Gentleman began in that rancorous tone and then started on his knockabout stuff in relation to the Liberal Democrat-Labour leadership of his county council. We did not have to have that; we all understand that bed blocking is a problem. We all know where its origins as a national phenomenon lie. We all know what the NHS and local authorities have had to endure these many years. We all know that we have begun the process of addressing those problems. The hon. Gentleman did not have to seek to point the finger at his own county council in the partisan, party political way that he did. It was simply not necessary.

Mr. Bob Russell: We have heard a one-sided view from the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess). This is a national issue as well as an Essex one. People are living longer and we have to return to the fact that the NHS has not been adequately funded. In the current financial year, Essex county council's revenue support grant was less than the amount required to fund the service.

Mr. Boateng: There we have it—part of the authentic voice of Essex. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Southend, West expresses surprise and incomprehension at what the British people decided at the last general election. It is because of his incomprehension of the needs of the British people that he and his colleagues find themselves in such greatly reduced numbers in the House. That is part and parcel of the reality—the hon. Gentleman finds it hard to comprehend the nature and spirit of the British people.

Mr. Amess: What is the Minister going to do about the problem?

Mr. Boateng: If the hon. Gentleman will be so kind as to contain himself, he will find out how we intend to proceed on this matter. He will also find out how we are markedly different from the Administration of which he was one of the most slavish and sycophantic supporters before taking the chicken run from Basildon to his present constituency. Let us be aware of the context in which the hon. Gentleman is raising this question.

I have had the opportunity to speak both to the chairman of the local social services department and to Mrs. Taylor, the chairman of the local NHS trust. We met in totally different circumstances, but I raised the issue of bed blocking with both of them. I have also made sure that officials in my Department have had an opportunity to consider the issue, specifically in relation to Essex.

What we find is this: that the Southend Healthcare NHS trust, the chief executive of South Essex district health authority and the director of Essex social services are working together on the issue. They are working in a collaborative way, trying to get past the culture of blame that, unfortunately, bedevilled the previous Administration. A report has gone to the executive board of South Essex health authority setting out a range of options that could be pursued to relieve the pressure caused by the current level of delayed discharges, including—the hon. Gentleman will be glad to hear this—the purchase of nursing home placement, the extension of domiciliary care services and new arrangements with the voluntary sector.

Let us pause at that point. What we are talking about is private provision and voluntary sector involvement, as well as and alongside public sector involvement—a big difference. I suggest that the big difference between the new Labour Government and the Conservative Government—to whose last Secretary of State for Health the hon. Gentleman made obeisance in characteristically sycophantic form in the closing part of his speech—is that we genuinely believe in public-private partnership. The hon. Gentleman and his party do not believe in it.

The Conservatives sought to distort the market. They never created a level playing field between the public and the private sector and, even more shamefully, they failed to put in place the proper regulatory mechanism to enable us to address that matter. We shall not make the same mistake. It is the Conservative party that is the party of dogma, which is why the number of their Members of Parliament has been so reduced. We are the party that is about dealing with the problems that we have inherited, and doing so in a practical and efficient way.

We have begun the process of bringing together the parties involved in this problem—parties concerned, first and foremost, with the experience of patients and concerned to make sure that patients get an opportunity to return, not only to the community, but to their own homes with the properly established rehabilitative and recuperative services that are necessary to ensure that we relieve the problem of bed blocking, but do not then have to re-admit them. That is very important and I am glad that, in the collaborative and co-operative manner that is now the order of the day in terms of the interface between the NHS and local authorities, the issue is being taken forward.

Good practice is what we need. The Government will seek to ensure that we get it—that we balance the needs and wishes of patients and their carers with the requirement for the most effective use of available resources, both public and private. The test will be quality and value for money. I want to encourage that patient-centred approach. Our manifesto made a commitment to introduce a charter for long-term care, which will set out what people can expect from health, housing and social services when they face difficult and sometimes painful decisions when making plans for their future care. I have set in motion within the Department the necessary work to bring that about.

Many patients need to be given the time and opportunity to recover properly from any treatment that they have received and any illness or conditions that they have been afflicted with. We shall give them that. We are anxious that at all times their dignity and independence are respected and nurtured.

I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Southend, West has brought this issue to the Floor of the House. I very much hope that we can continue to work in a non-party political, non-partisan way, across the boundaries and fault lines that exist in the political process and, above all, across the boundaries and fault lines that have existed from time to time between the NHS and local authorities. I hope that, in that spirit, he will find my response to this important debate helpful and constructive.

This is only the beginning. Things can only get better and we are here to work with the NHS and local government to ensure that that happens, to ensure that all our citizens—

The motion having been made at half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 9 June 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mandatory Minimum Sentences

1. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce mandatory minimum sentences. [914]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I am considering the relevant provisions of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 against the need to ensure that sufficient provision is available within the Prison Service.

Mr. Streeter: I am afraid that that answer does absolutely nothing for me. The Labour party talked tough in opposition and, apparently, is already acting soft in government. Why will not the Secretary of State join us in sending a clear signal to serious repeat offenders, by agreeing today to introduce minimum mandatory sentences?

Mr. Straw: I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I dare say that it will be the first of many occasions when I do so. The hon. Gentleman, however, is way behind the times. I made it clear on 19 May, in the debate on the Loyal Address, that I fully intended to implement section 2 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 relating to life sentences for serious violent and sexual offenders as soon as possible and, I hope, within the time frame laid down by the previous Administration.

Mr. Beith: What is the Home Secretary's estimate of the number of new prison places that would be required to implement each of the mandatory sentencing provisions of that legislation? Is he seriously prepared to contemplate the massive diversion of resources from policing and crime prevention that would be involved in building another 10 or 20 new prisons over and above those required to deal with the present trend in prison numbers to implement that legislation, which had much of the character of a confidence trick by the previous Administration, willing the end without willing the means?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman is entirely right in his last point. The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) made several undertakings about the future of the prison population without the backing of his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)—a habit which he has not broken out of in opposition.

However, I was asked specific questions. It is estimated that section 2 would lead to an increase of between 600 and 800 prison places over a 15-year period. As most of those offenders—the serious violent and sexual offenders—are bound to be sentenced to prison in any event, the impact in the next five to 10 years on the prison population will be small.

It is estimated that section 3, relating to drug dealers, would have an impact on the prison population over a similar period of about 200 places.

The estimated impact on the prison population of section 4, relating to repeat burglars, is significant. It is also significant because the most that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe could do was to provide an illustration of when that policy might be implemented, sometime in 2001—near the next general election.

Mr. Llwyd: I remind the Home Secretary that, in Committee, there was much talk about the need for a working definition of "exceptional circumstances" in which a judge could exercise discretion not to impose mandatory sentences. In view of the considerable time spent on that subject in Committee—I remember that the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) spent much time, as I did, trying to knead that out—does the Home Secretary have any information on that very important aspect?

Mr. Straw: My view is that section 1, which sets down the special circumstances that would apply to sections 3 and 4 of the Act relating to drug dealers and repeat burglars, is in satisfactory order. When he was Secretary of State, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe denied that. He put his argument to the people of this country at the recent general election. It was the only law and order issue that he argued about throughout a six-week campaign; the people of the country gave a clear answer in that regard.

On section 2, relating to automatic life sentences for serious sexual and violent offenders on a second or subsequent occasion, I am also satisfied that the narrower definition of "exceptional circumstances" is the appropriate one.

Criminal Activity

2. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to address the circumstances that lead to criminal activity. [915]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): As well as speeding up youth justice, we plan to implement a wide range of measures to divert potential offenders away from criminal activity. We intend to have parental responsibility orders to ensure that parents face up to their responsibilities when their children misbehave and new child protection orders to help keep children off the streets and out of trouble late at night. We are also determined to break the vicious circle between crime and

drug and alcohol misuse, and, through our welfare to work programme, enable young people to find work and stay in work.

Mr. Cunningham: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment to the Front Bench. This is the first time that I have had an opportunity to do so. Does he recall the series of meetings held both in Coventry and in the House of Commons to discuss juvenile crime and, in particular, community safety orders? Can he give us an idea when those safety orders will be introduced so that we can satisfy people in Coventry, who have been extremely concerned about that?

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. I know of the great interest that he took in this matter during the last Parliament. I was grateful for his active support on a number of Committees dealing with legislation. We should also pay tribute to the efforts made by Coventry city council, working with the local police, to find a way, despite the gap in legislation, to control some of the difficult problems that have arisen. I agree that there is a problem. When we were in opposition, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary touched a chord when he proposed community safety orders, which will enable the police and local authorities to tackle the real problems experienced throughout the country, and he was applauded for that. We intend to make allowance for introducing those orders within the crime and disorder Bill, which will be debated later in the Session.

Mr. Greenway: Will the new Labour Government honour the pledge of the last Conservative Government and introduce more closed circuit television cameras in towns and villages, as they have had a devastating effect in reducing crime?

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman's question would have been more impressive had he checked the Home Office budget. He would then have seen that although the previous Home Secretary made statements during the election period, he made no financial allowance to fulfil those manifesto commitments. He has not put the money in the budget.

Mr. Cunliffe: Is not one of the principal reasons for the rise in youth crime pointed out by many licensees and suppliers: under-age drinking is on the increase? Does he agree that the best deterrent would be to introduce some form—voluntary or compulsory—of identity card, to include photograph and age?

Mr. Michael: A voluntary identity card is still under consideration, but my hon. Friend is right to identify the problem of youth drinking and rising youth crime. The Under–Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), has taken up the issue of alcopops with the industry and is pursuing it vigorously. Alcohol-related crime is a serious problem. The steps that we intend to take in relation to youth crime will have a significant impact, but the problem of drink-related crime among young people, as among older groups, is serious.

Prison Population (Growth)

3. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to curb the rate of growth in the prison population. [916]

Mr. Straw: Within a broad sentencing framework laid down by Parliament, who is sentenced to imprisonment and for how long is a matter for independent decision by the courts. On present trends, the prison population is likely to rise in the foreseeable future. In the longer term, the growth in the prison population should be affected by action that we are taking to deal with the appalling delays in the criminal justice system and, above all, by our policies to tackle youth crime to stop so many young offenders graduating to adult crime and adult prisons.

Mr. Boswell: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new position. He will have heard the earlier exchanges on the importance of differentiating between dangerous criminals and society's demands for their incarceration. Does he accept that we simply cannot go on building prisons for ever? Will he take the longest and most careful possible look at the distinction between those who must be in prison for the public's safety and those for whom alternative approaches may be appropriate, whether or not he gets the benefit of his social policies in due course? Will he undertake to look carefully at the situation in Onley in my constituency, where his proposal for a second prison is giving rise to a great deal of concern on the part of my constituents?

Mr. Straw: I thought that there was a reason for the question, and it emerged right at the end. Everybody wants criminals locked up, but not in his own backyard.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations. Despite the debates that took place at the end of the last Parliament about mandatory minimum sentences, every single person currently serving a prison sentence is in prison because of sentencing decisions made under the Criminal Justice Act 1991 by independent sentencers. Any Government must take account of the public spending consequences of a rising prison population. At the same time, we must recognise that, after a period of 18 years during which crime doubled, there are many serious criminals whom courts consider it appropriate to lock up in prison.

Mr. Campbell–Savours: Does the prison system that my right hon. Friend inherited from a Conservative Government really work, or will there have to be revolutionary changes in it?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right to say that prison works for some prisoners. It plainly works to incapacitate prisoners. Of the 60,000 people currently in prison, the courts have made their own independent judgment that that is the most appropriate place for them to serve their sentence. Like almost every other hon. Member, I do not want people to be sentenced unnecessarily to prison, but sentencers will not use community sentences to the extent that perhaps they should, unless and until there is more public confidence in those sentences, and the public can be assured that their safety is guaranteed as far as possible when people serve community sentences.

Madam Speaker: Before I call the next speaker, may I ask Ministers to remember that they are addressing the House and not the individual who put the question? We would all like to hear the answer, and I like to see handsome faces, even if they are only in profile.

Miss Widdecombe: I invite the right hon. Gentleman to note that I have two prisons in my backyard, of which I am extremely proud. Considering that he will have to house the population growth and additional prisoners as a result of the previous Government's very apt sentencing policy, will he clarify once and for all what hitherto has been fudged on a number of occasions? Will he tell the taxpayer and the public at large whether he will honour current private sector contracts and let all prisons be privately managed in future under the private finance initiative?

Mr. Straw: I apologise for the fact that I was turning away from you, Madam Speaker. That was a serious omission on my part.

I made it clear before the election that we would honour existing contracts that were in the pipeline. I said that in a lecture to the Bourne Trust in January 1995. With regard to renewal, that depends on value-for-money considerations, as I made clear on 19 May.

Mr. Flynn: When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State drafts his welcome new law which will apply to hon. Members and introduce prison sentences for acts of corruption, will he ensure that that Act applies retrospectively?

Mr. Straw: Much as I would be tempted to make such an Act apply retrospectively, it is an important principle that Parliament should not pass retrospectively Acts which make into crimes previous acts that were not crimes.

Immigration Policy

4. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the changes which the Government propose to make to immigration policy as regards the primary purpose rule and the admission of elderly relatives. [917]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): We announced the abolition of the primary purpose rule on 5 June in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). We have no plans at present to change the rules relating to the admission of elderly relatives.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Will the Minister confirm that that extremely important policy change will apply to current cases, that is, ones in which the refusal took place before 5 June or the appeal was made before then? Bearing in mind the fact that many of the people concerned have waited a long time already and have been subject to considerable delays, will the Minister examine the representations of the Immigration Advisory Service, which provides an excellent service? The IAS believes that there may be further delays stemming from the difference between a genuine marriage and the primary purpose rule. Will the Minister make sure that having sorted out one problem, we do not create another?

Mr. O'Brien: We are glad that the hon. Gentleman supports our proposals, and we hope that he will continue to support us in future. We shall review all outstanding appeals. Where the refusal was based solely on primary purpose grounds, we shall return the papers to the entry clearance officer who will issue the clearance. Where the refusal was based on primary purpose and other grounds, we shall examine the case in full. However, we shall lodge appeals in most cases.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank my hon. Friend for making the change, which will be widely welcomed. The press release that announced the change suggested that the 12-month probationary period for marriage would remain. Will my hon. Friend look sympathetically at cases where women are forced by violent relationships to leave the marriage within one year? We would not wish to see the deportation of people in that situation. Will he consider also the plight of elderly dependants? EU citizens living in Britain have more right than British citizens to bring elderly dependants into the country.

Mr. O'Brien: My hon. Friend raises several important points. The one-year rule will remain. As to domestic violence cases, he will be aware that I was a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee that made recommendations in that regard. We are currently examining the issues relating to domestic violence cases and the operation of the one-year rule.

In the case of elderly relatives, I am conscious of the paradox that my hon. Friend describes. We are examining the issues involved and we are committed not only to having fairer immigration and asylum rules but to ensuring that they are both firm and fair.

Mr. Howard: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment. Does he recognise that the changes will open up a substantial loophole in our system of immigration control? Our excellent race relations record has always gone hand in hand with firm but fair immigration control. Does not the change put that record at risk?

Mr. O'Brien: It is a pity that the right hon. and learned Gentleman does not share the views of the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), who supports our proposals. The primary purpose rule was a rule without a purpose: it was unfair and arbitrary. Too often, it caught genuine marriages where the parties intended to live together permanently in the United Kingdom. The abolition of that rule without a purpose enables us to focus resources on the remaining three marriage rules that deal with bogus marriages more effectively. Compared with the last Government, our policy will be firmer but fairer. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wanted to do something about bogus marriages, why did he not deal with the immigration advisers and other such scandals? He refused to address those problems year upon year.

Deportees (Detention)

5. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions have been held with representatives of the Scottish Prison Service concerning the circumstances surrounding the detention of persons awaiting deportation. [918]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Discussions took place with the Scottish Prison Service last summer about the detention of persons awaiting deportation. These discussions found that, due to the relatively small number of persons held in Scottish prisons under sole immigration powers, it would be difficult to justify a custom-built facility solely for Immigration Act detainees.

Dr. Godman: In my view, such persons should not be detained in Greenock prison, where a serious disturbance took place recently involving convicted prisoners and persons awaiting deportation. Will my hon. Friend consider establishing a detention centre, like those in England and Wales, for persons awaiting deportation from Scotland?

Mr. O'Brien: I am looking again at the rules regarding detention in prisons. The Scottish situation involves several issues—for example, the numbers: approximately 20 to 30 persons are held in Scottish establishments at any one time. It would also be unfair to lodge all immigration detainees in one establishment, as they would be away from friends, relatives and perhaps legal representatives.

Because of the small numbers involved, it is not practical to separate immigration detainees from other prisoners. Immigration detainees are generally treated in a similar way to remand prisoners—a situation which will probably continue for some time. However, I invite my hon. Friend to discuss the matter with me at greater length because the general issues and the case that he mentioned raise important questions.

Crime (Drug Abuse)

6. **Mr. Tony Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of crime he estimates to be linked to drug abuse. [919]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. George Howarth): My hon. Friend will be aware that the university of Cambridge is conducting an investigation into the links between drugs and crime. Not surprisingly, the preliminary findings are that such links exist, but we shall have to wait until October for the final version of the report, which we hope will be published by the end of the year.

Mr. Clarke: I welcome those comments and add my congratulations to those given earlier to my hon. Friend. Does he agree that previous studies have shown a distinct link between drug abuse and crime—so much so that the police estimate that two thirds of all crime is drug related? Does my hon. Friend therefore agree that the public will welcome the measures that he is proposing to reclaim the streets in the fight against crime and the fear of crime that flourished under the previous Government?

Mr. Howarth: I very much agree. A raft of anecdotal evidence from chief constables and others shows strong links between drugs and crime and disorder. Our proposed treatment and testing order will address that problem. We hope that it will give the probation service and others a means to provide treatment for addicts and therefore break the link with spiralling crime. I hope that that measure will have the support of the whole House.

Mr. Malins: Does the Minister accept that a huge amount of crime is linked to drug abuse—not just the drug takers but burglars who sell the goods to feed their drugs habit? Does he agree that we should adopt a much tougher attitude towards first-time drug takers, many of whom are dealt with in the courts more leniently than those convicted of minor traffic offences?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I am sure that he agrees that the most important issue for the Government is to deal with drug offenders and other offenders in ways that are clear and have been shown to work. We aim to break the link between drugs—possession, dealing or other aspects of the problem—and other forms of crime, including burglary. We shall pursue that clear intention and I am sure that we shall have the support of the whole House.

Mr. Miller: When my hon. Friend considers the paper presented to him by Parents Against Drug Abuse from my constituency, will he look carefully at the proposal for a national network of telephone helplines? When he considers the cost, will he also consider the potential savings to the public purse from improved advice to young people to ensure that they do not get involved in drugs at an early age, cutting the links with crime?

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has written to me about that group in his constituency. I hope to meet him and the group in the near future. Parents, together with the education service and others, have an important role in trying to find ways, at the earliest possible stage, to prevent young people from getting involved in drugs. The initiatives that my hon. Friend describes are of interest and I look forward to discussing them.

Mr. Maclean: I, too, welcome the hon. Gentleman to his first Home Office questions on the Government side of the House. He has laid great emphasis on his new drug treatment and testing order. How would it add to the extensive powers already available to the courts when ordering a probation order with conditions?

Mr. Howarth: The right hon. Gentleman should know that there are problems with exercising probation orders in this context. Last week, I visited a probation-led scheme in Plymouth where there are problems in getting co-ordination between the various departments of the criminal justice system and the health service, for example. The whole purpose of the treatment and testing order is to bring all those factors together, to link that to what happens in the courts and to ensure that all the agencies bring all their skills and resources to bear on the problem. That has not been happening to the extent that it should have done. We recognise that, and that is the whole point of the treatment and testing order.

Mandatory Sentences

7. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to implement the mandatory sentencing provisions of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997. [920]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave a few moments ago to the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter).

Mr. Lidington: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment. Does he consider that a three-year prison sentence for a career burglar is too long?

Mr. Straw: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his congratulations. As I made clear during the passage of the Crime (Sentences) Bill, I do not consider that three years is too long for the typical career burglar. We expect that kind of sentence to be carried forward.

Pistol Clubs

8. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many pistol clubs there are in the United Kingdom; how many there were a year ago; and what was their total membership. [921]

Mr. Michael: The total number of pistol clubs approved by the Secretary of State throughout the United Kingdom is 1,605. Precise information about the number of such clubs a year ago could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Government have no information on the number of members of approved pistol clubs.

Mr. Colvin: It seems clear from that reply that a number of pistol target shooting clubs have managed to survive on the basis of small-bore .22 shooting alone. As the Minister will know from the introductory explanatory memorandum to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, which the House will consider on Wednesday, it is highly likely that none of those clubs will exist if the Bill is enacted unamended. Will he ensure that proper compensation is paid not only to the owners of firearms and ancillary equipment, but to owners of clubs that will lose their premises, their business and their fee income? That would rectify one of the injustices of the present Act and give the Minister, whom I congratulate on his appointment, an opportunity to rectify an injustice and to demonstrate to the House that new Labour really is new.

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome and for the implied criticism of his right hon. and hon. Friends in that he is inviting us to go way beyond the compensation allowed for in the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, which was enacted before the general election. Of the 1,440 clubs approved for pistols in England and Wales, only 49 were approved for pistols only—less than 4 per cent. of the total. In any event, it is right that individuals who were affected by the legislation should be compensated. We have no intention of going beyond that.

Mr. Salter: Is my hon. Friend aware that replica pistols that are exact copies of those used in gun clubs are openly and lawfully on sale to young children in Reading and elsewhere? Is he further aware that those replica weapons, including imitation Magnum .45s, are indistinguishable from the real thing, and can be, and have been, used in armed robberies? What action does my hon. Friend propose to take to deal with the issue?

Mr. Michael: I am aware of the problem, which has been highlighted on a number of occasions. My hon. Friend will be aware that we have targeted one specific gap in the law for action this Session—that is the continuation of the availability of .22 handguns. We have taken the view that the legislation, which will be debated in the House later this week, needs to be narrow in order for it to proceed through the House quickly. We decided, therefore, that we would not address wider issues. We shall return to issues of the sort that my hon. Friend raises. I shall look carefully at the evidence he has described which, I am sure, he will wish to supplement following today's discussion. We shall certainly wish to address the issue he raises.

Prison Places

10. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he plans to take to ensure the continuing provision of an adequate number of prison places. [924]

The Minister of State, Home Office (Ms Joyce Quin): My right hon. Friend outlined the options available for the prison population issues in answer to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell).

The Prison Service secured additional resources in last year's Budget to speed up refurbishment of Victorian wings and to provide 8,600 new places to ensure adequate prison capacity over the next three years.

Mr. Lansley: Will the hon. Lady ensure that the supply of prison places is sufficient to implement a policy of honesty in sentencing so that there will be no automatic early release from prison?

Ms Quin: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, we are committed to honesty in sentencing. We are also keen to examine a range of options to improve the system, including speeding up certain aspects of the criminal justice system and cutting delays affecting remand, for example.

Mr. Pike: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her appointment. Does she agree that far too many people in England are held in custody on remand awaiting trial and that we need to take steps at least to equal the position in Scotland and ensure that people are tried as speedily as possible?

Ms Quin: My hon. Friend raises an important matter which we are looking at urgently. It is certainly one part of the system which is crying out for reform.

Mr. Rowe: I am sure that the Minister is aware that over the past 30 years or so some of the best ways of helping people when they come out of prison and preventing young people from going to prison have been

imaginative schemes created in partnership with voluntary organisations. I am sure that she is also aware that many such schemes are funded by the Home Office in the first instance for a maximum of three years and are then expected to be picked up by the local authorities, which have a lamentable record in doing any such thing. Will she make sure that the balance between the advantages gained by local authorities and by central Government from the successful schemes is examined again?

Ms Quin: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, my hon. Friend the other Minister of State takes great interest in the voluntary sector and is keen to promote best practice and encourage projects such as those to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. Local authorities have found it difficult to finance many such schemes because of their budgets, but we are looking at ways to ensure that the best schemes can be carried forward successfully.

Women Prisoners

11. **Ms Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of convicted women prisoners in England and Wales are serving sentences for non–payment of fines. [925]

Ms Joyce Quin: At the end of the first quarter of 1997, women sentenced to imprisonment for default on fines represented around 0.2 per cent. of women serving a prison sentence in England and Wales. The number of fine defaulters in prison is now falling steadily.

Ms Corston: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her welcome and excellent appointment. Has she had time to look at Home Office research published last July which found that despite the welcome fall in the number of women fine defaulters, they are generally unemployed and have multiple debts of some £1,300? Would it not be more appropriate to find other means of punishing those women as, in most cases, they have shown not unwillingness to pay a fine but inability to do so?

Ms Quin: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words of welcome. She has raised an important matter. We must find ways to ensure that imprisonment is seen only as a last resort. We shall look closely at the issue of fine defaulting in the coming months.

Mr. Garnier: I, too, congratulate the hon. Lady on her new appointment. In regard to the main question, has she looked at the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997?

Ms Quin: Yes. We believe that it is helpful in many respects. I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his kind words. As the question refers in particular to women prisoners, I should also like to make it clear that, as a new Minister in the Home Office, women's prisons and the female prison estate are matters that I shall look at carefully in the near future.

Mr. Howard: I, too, congratulate the hon. Lady on her appointment. Will she tell us a little more than the Home Secretary did a few moments ago about the Government's plans to sign new contracts for privately operated prisons? Did she share the Home Secretary's previously expressed view that such prisons are "morally repugnant"? If so, when did she change her mind?

Ms Quin: I am somewhat surprised that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should choose to ask a supplementary question on a main question about the proportion of convicted women prisoners serving sentences for non-payment of fines. The main question has already been answered by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Among other things, we are considering the recommendation of the Home Affairs Committee report, which made some very interesting proposals on that subject.

Young Offenders Institution, Colchester

12. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the future of the young offenders institution at Colchester military corrective training centre. [926]

Mr. George Howarth: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Government are committed to finding out what works in the prison system. In line with that, we have decided that the Colchester experiment will run to the end of the year, when it is due to be concluded. In the light of that experience, we will decide on its long-term future.

Mr. Russell: Does the Minister agree that both the Prison Service and the military authorities were opposed to the establishment of the boot camp in Colchester? Although both military and prison staff should be congratulated, does he accept that the prime reason for the military establishment being foisted on Colchester in the run-up to the general election had more to do with a very expensive face-saving exercise by the former Home Secretary? Will the experiment run until the end of the calendar year or the financial year? Will he make it the sooner of the two? How does the cost of the Colchester institution compare with that of a normal institution?

Mr. Howarth: Irrespective of how the establishment came about, the point is that, if the Government were to try to reverse the decision, all the money that has already been spent on it would be wasted, so it obviously makes sense to allow the establishment to complete its first year. By first year I mean the full first year of its operation. On comparable costs, the establishment is marginally more expensive than, for example, a young offenders institution. Any establishment with such a highly structured regime will be more expensive. The cheapest way of keeping prisoners is to lock them up and do nothing with them. That is not what we intend. We shall certainly look at the results of the experiment to see whether there are any wider applications.

Mr. Whittingdale: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the high rate of reoffending among young offenders suggests that the present system is not working and that anything that can bring it down is likely to be good value for money? Is he aware of the considerable success in remotivating and rehabilitating service offenders at the military corrective training centre and that, contrary to the suggestion of the hon. Member for

Colchester (Mr. Russell), the staff at the MCTC are convinced that they can remotivate and rehabilitate civilian offenders by employing the same methods?

Mr. Howarth: I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's point that we should look at the results and see how the two systems compare. That is precisely the point that I made. There are no easy options in dealing with young offenders. One of the things to which the Government are absolutely committed is breaking the link between young people and crime and all the things that lead to young people becoming involved in crime. We will find out what works, and what works is precisely what we will implement to deal with the problem.

Closed Circuit Television Schemes

13. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money his Department plans to set aside over the next five years to provide for CCTV schemes. [927]

Mr. Michael: Our manifesto made it clear that for the next two years we will work within the ceilings on departmental expenditure that have already been announced. We are reviewing existing expenditure programmes and reassessing priorities to ensure that we make best use of the resources available. A decision on whether there will be another closed circuit television challenge competition in 1997-98 will be made later in the summer.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Given the huge success of CCTV, which in Guildford alone has cut street crime in the city centre by more than a third in one year, and the popularity of the previous Government's pledge to spend £75 million on CCTV in this Parliament, why is the Minister being so evasive, and why is he failing to live up to his party's promises on the subject? Are not the Government being weak on crime and weak on crime prevention?

Mr. Michael: We will be tough on inappropriate soundbites. The hon. Gentleman should show some respect for the fact that we are keeping our manifesto commitments whereas the former Home Secretary gave promises during the election campaign for which he had not made allowance during his period in office. We will assess whether next year's money—this year's money was completely allocated before we took office—would be best used on CCTV alone or whether it could be better used in other ways. We have inherited a limited financial situation from the previous Government, but we will ensure that we use the available money to prevent and tackle crime in a way that the Conservative Government failed to do.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Before my hon. Friend spends £75 million, will he make a careful assessment of how effective CCTV is in controlling crime; whether it displaces crime to other areas that are unable to deal with it; and what implications it has for the protection of human rights?

Mr. Michael: People feel safer with CCTV and, fortunately, there have been few abuses of its provision. I supported the provision of CCTV in my local town centre and it is of value in wider community safety and crime prevention. It is not a magic wand that will do everything; other issues of crime prevention need to be tackled also. For that reason, we will review the available expenditure and we intend to ensure that it is used to the best result for the future protection of the public.

Violent Crime

15. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of violent crime resulted in prosecution in (a) 1979 and (b) the latest period for which figures are available. [929]

Mr. Michael: In 1979, 59 per cent. of recorded violent crimes resulted in prosecutions. In 1995, the figure was down to 35 per cent.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and wish him well in his new post. It is significant that violent crime almost trebled under the Conservative Government, while prosecutions fell by more than half. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Labour Government have inherited an appalling legacy from the Conservatives? We have more violent crime and more people getting away with violent crime. Will he assure me that resources will be afforded to West Yorkshire police to help them continue their strenuous efforts to reduce violent crime in our local communities?

Mr. Michael: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. He is right to highlight the previous Government's failure. Nothing could illustrate that failure more than the way crime increased, yet the number of people convicted and punished fell. The fall in prosecution rates is a serious matter and we will address it through our plans to increase the efficiency of the Crown Prosecution Service and other steps that will enable the police, the courts and other agencies to be more successful in tackling and preventing crime. We believe that the police have been overwhelmed in recent years by bureaucracy and the increasing crime rate; we intend to ensure that they can make better use of existing resources to prevent crime, catch criminals and increase public safety.

Probation Service

16. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for the future of the probation and after care service. [930]

Ms Joyce Quin: The probation service plays a central role in our strategy for the criminal justice system and for reducing crime. We will work with the service to ensure that community sentences and punishments are a credible option when it is not necessary to send an offender to prison.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I welcome my hon. Friend and her team to their new posts, and I hope that their appointment results in a radically different philosophy at the Home Office from that of the past 18 years—building more and more prisons for more and more crime. With that in mind, will they look in detail at the reparation and mediation schemes operated successfully by West Yorkshire

probation service, which has addressed the issue of cutting reoffending, particularly by young offenders? Will my hon. Friend consider the value of the probation service in working to develop alternatives to imprisonment for a vast number of offenders?

Ms Quin: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. I can give him the assurance he seeks. We are aware of the good work in West Yorkshire. We want to promote good practice in the probation service and increase awareness across the country.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: Will the Minister pay tribute to the probation service in Essex, which has demonstrated that a probation order is not a soft option? Does she agree that it is not necessary for a probation officer to have a degree in social work?

Ms Quin: I am happy, although rather surprised, to endorse the hon. Gentleman's point about Essex. I further agree with his point about qualifications. We are in discussion with representatives of the probation service and others about how best to take the issue forward, given the unfortunate vacuum created by the previous Government.

Electoral Reform

17. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's proposals for considering a new voting system for parliamentary elections. [931]

Mr. Straw: By our manifesto, the Government are committed to a referendum on the voting system for the House of Commons. The manifesto continued:

"An independent Commission on voting systems will be appointed early to recommend a proportional alternative to the first-past-the-post system."

Work is now in hand to establish the commission and I will make a further announcement as soon as I can.

Mr. Bayley: My right hon. Friend's helpful reply will confound the critics who wrongly speculated that the size of the Government's majority would mean that Labour might now backpedal on its commitment to a referendum on the electoral system. Will he be a little more specific on the timetable? When does he hope the electoral commission will be established and start its work?

Mr. Straw: I thank my hon. Friend for his opening point, although it should be no surprise that we are settling with a will to implement all our manifesto promises, and the size of our majority makes that all the more straightforward. He asks what we mean by "early"; we mean as early as possible. I hope to make an announcement during the summer.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will Labour Members be whipped to vote in favour of a referendum? Does the Prime Minister's position remain as it was? Is he still opposed personally to a change in our voting system?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman may not have noticed, but the idea of having a referendum is so that the issue is decided not on a whipped or free vote in the House of Commons, but by the British people. Regardless of the partisan views that some of us may hold, it is high time the matter was settled once and for all by the British people.

Mr. Grocott: Does my right hon. Friend agree that anyone considering this issue would be well advised to look at the experience of New Zealand at its recent election, where many people who, prior to the election, thought a change to the electoral system was a good idea are not so sure having seen it in practice? Does he further agree that the first-past-the-post system—like any other system—has its disadvantages, but has many advantages as well?

Mr. Straw: I share my hon. Friend's view on his last point. It is a personal point of view, but it was my view when we were in a minority and in opposition and it is my view now that we are in government. Of course, around the world there are many examples of proportional representation systems, which have advantages and disadvantages. That is all the more reason why they should be examined by an independent commission, which should then produce its recommendations.

Mr. Richard Allan: Does the Secretary of State agree that reform and a fairer voting system in time for the European elections in 1999 will be an important test of faith of the Government's commitment to electoral reform in principle? Can he give us an idea of how he may introduce such changes with the necessary urgency to get there for 1999?

Mr. Straw: No, I would not agree with the hon. Gentleman. There was no manifesto commitment to introduce proportional representation or the regional list system by the 1999 European elections. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made clear, we will take final decisions on the appropriate electoral system, which we will recommend to this House and the other place, in the next few months.

Prisons (Illegal Drugs)

18. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new proposals he has to reduce illegal drugs use in prisons. [932]

Mr. George Howarth: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government are very concerned about the extent to which drug abuse takes place in prison. That is why we will be seeking to build on, for example, mandatory drug testing and the availability of drug treatment programmes in the prison system. We hope to keep a good eye on the problem and to find out what else needs to be done—what needs to be done is what will be done.

Mr. Flynn: In welcoming my hon. Friend, may I sympathise about the dreadful situation that he has inherited from the last Government, with a prison system in which illegal drug use is endemic and out of control in the great majority of British prisons? Has he observed that it has been claimed that the drug testing programme has had the perverse effect of making prisoners move from the use of soft drugs, which can easily be detected, to

hard drugs whose detection is often difficult? Is he also concerned that many prisoners have moved from the use of illegal drugs to the use of medicinal drugs? Ten times as many people are addicted to medicinal drugs as to hard drugs. Will he make the figures available to this Parliament—unlike the previous Government, who denied the figures on the use of medicinal drugs in prisons to hon. Members?

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who raises an important point. One of the ways in which we will seek to help people in prison get off drugs is by introducing access to voluntary testing for all prisoners. In time, we hope to be able to establish that system, so that they can prove that they are living a drug-free existence.

The statistics for drug abuse and the perverse incentive to move from cannabis to opiates are less than clear. I have asked for further information and statisticians are working on it. As soon as that information is available, I will certainly undertake to publish it if it is in a reasonable format. It is important that we take whatever steps are available to enable people who are caught up in drug abuse in prison to move away from it and to prevent drugs from getting into prisons in the first place.

HM Prison Weare

19. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use of HM Prison Weare, based in Portland. [933]

Mr. Straw: As the hon. Gentleman knows I visited Her Majesty's Prison Weare on 16 May. I am pleased to be able to tell him that the health and safety concerns relating to the occupation of The Weare have now been resolved. The Health and Safety Executive, the Home Office fire adviser, the Dorset fire service, the port authorities and the Prison Officers Association have all agreed that it is now safe to occupy a part of the accommodation before completion of the refurbishment work elsewhere in the prison. Prison population pressure makes it essential that we take into use the top landing at The Weare. I have therefore decided that up to 50 category D sentenced prisoners will occupy The Weare from 11 June. The refurbishment work on the remaining accommodation will be completed in July, allowing the prisoner population to rise to 400 in stages.

Mr. Bruce: This is the first time I have said this: it is difficult to ask a supplementary because the main question has been so well answered by the Home Secretary. I thank him for that. Will he reiterate what I have been saying to my constituents: that no Home Secretary, including him, will allow prisoners or prison staff to go into the prison ship unless he wholly satisfied about their safety?

Mr. Skinner: This broad church is getting broader.

Mr. Straw: There is always space for sinners to repent, and I welcome the hon. Gentleman's endorsement of my answer. He asked about health and safety: the prison ship is not an ideal solution to the rising prison population, but it is one of the many far from ideal situations that we inherited on taking office. As he knows, I visited the ship, which is in his constituency, and went to great lengths to satisfy myself personally that it was safe to house prisoners.

I have ensured the fullest possible scrutiny of the concerns of the Prison Officers Association, which hired a marine consultant to check the safety of the ship. We answered every one of the concerns that the association quite rightly raised, and it has written to me saying that it now endorses the opening on a phased basis of the prison ship. The cell accommodation is of a higher standard than is to be found in most land-based prisons in this country.

Breast Screening

3.30 pm

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the errors in the results of breast screening scans carried out in Exeter and east Devon and give whatever assurances are possible to the many women who are extremely worried about the situation.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Frank Dobson): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for bringing this very serious matter to the attention of the House.

I am determined that the truth should out, and the awful truth is that 12 women who were not referred for treatment after being screened for breast cancer subsequently developed breast cancer, and two of them have died.

More than 12,000 women are screened for breast cancer each year by the Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS trust and the South Devon Healthcare NHS trust. As a result of that screening, some women are identified as having breast cancer and referred for further tests and treatment; others are told that they need not return for further screening until three years have elapsed; and others are told that they do not need treatment, but should return for earlier screening. The trusts cannot tell me how many women fell into each category, but all 12 of the women to whom I referred were screened, but not referred for treatment.

In February, medical staff at the Royal Devon and Exeter trust expressed concern about women who had been screened and not treated and who subsequently developed cancer. The trust sent details of all 12 cases to the national breast screening centre in Nottingham on 1 April and asked for its advice.

The centre did not reply until 28 May, when it concluded that the 12 women concerned should have been referred for treatment, and recommended an audit of mammograms of all women scheduled for recall earlier than three years; of all women recalled in the past two years; and of all breast cancers that have occurred between screenings in the past five years. None of those audits is yet under way.

The review also recommended that the two doctors concerned should stop screening for the time being, pending further training. A special helpline was established on 5 June for women in Exeter and Devon who want advice, help or reassurance. I understand that the doctors concerned have also been carrying out screening at private hospitals in the area and that a similar helpline has been established.

Breast cancer screening, like other forms of medical screening, has two purposes: to identify patients who need treatment and to reassure patients who do not. The breast cancer arrangements in Exeter and Devon have failed on both counts. They have failed to ensure the most prompt treatment for breast cancer and they have given false reassurance. I am not satisfied with the performance of East Devon breast screening service. I have asked the chief medical officer to conduct a preliminary inquiry. If I remain as dissatisfied after that as I am now, I shall exercise my statutory powers to establish an independent inquiry.

At the same time, I have asked the chief medical officer to review the breast screening programme nationwide. Women in England deserve a breast screening service on which they can rely to identify cancer when it is present and to give accurate reassurance when it is not. On behalf of the Government, I offer my sympathy to all the women affected by the failure and to their families. Finally, I urge women to continue to attend centres for breast cancer screening, because, whatever went wrong in the south-west, screening remains the best method of identifying breast cancer and ensuring early treatment.

Sir Peter Emery: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement, which is most serious and causes me perhaps even greater concern than I had had before I tabled the question. He said that he could not give the exact numbers. Can he either now or in the immediate future publish in the *Official Report* the number of people who have been recalled for tests; the number of people who have had reassessment carried out; the number of ladies who have had to be recalled for biopsy, which I gather is one of the likely factors; and, equally important, how many of the 36,000 ladies who would have been tested over the three years can be assured that they are not affected? How many mammogram films must be rechecked?

The second part of my question involves staffing. I gather that two doctors have been told to stay away and will be retrained, but how many staff are employed? I gather that there are very few. Inadequate staffing may mean that work will come to a standstill and that it may not be possible to carry out reassessment fully or quickly. What action will the Secretary of State take to overcome that problem?

Mr. Dobson: The right hon. Gentleman raises two points. He asked about the extent of screening, the incidence of cancer and the number of women who were recalled. Those are the very questions which I have been asking, on which the trust cannot currently give me an answer—a fact which in itself I find disturbing. On the second point, arrangements are being made for the necessary experts in assessing mammograms to be drafted in to help out in east Devon, to ensure that the service is provided and, in particular, that the reassurance that women in the area will naturally be seeking can be given.

Mrs. Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that his recent welcome announcement of £10 million of additional funding to improve breast screening services, which was obtained by cutting red tape in the health service, will go a long way to ensure that such incidents, which cause such grave anxiety to women in Devon, do not recur?

Mr. Dobson: I am pleased that we were able to provide additional resources as we had promised. It remains the case that if proper standards are not being maintained by those responsible for the service, things will go wrong and women will suffer. We must ensure, both through the professions and through the national health service, that the necessary standards are reached.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): I should like to begin by associating the Opposition with the sympathy that the right hon. Gentleman expressed to the women of the area in relation to this obvious failure of service.

The right hon. Gentleman said that he does not know how many cases are being recalled for further audit. Can he therefore confirm that the figure that appeared in last week's press, that 1,900 cases were being recalled for audit, is wrong? Can he further confirm that as soon as he knows how many cases are being recalled for audit, the women concerned will be the first to be told? Is it not the case that one of the most disturbing aspects of the story is that both those women and the doctors concerned first heard about the story through the newspapers? Must it not be the principle of this kind of service that first the patients and, secondly, the clinicians hear about such evidence directly from the hospital and not through the newspapers?

Can the right hon. Gentleman further confirm that it is the second time in three years that East Devon breast screening service has been subject of a review? A review was conducted in 1994 because of concern about the low rate of detection of cancer that was reported from east Devon. Can the Secretary of State tell the House whether the latest report will analyse whether the recommendations of the earlier report were implemented, or whether there are still outstanding recommendations that should have been implemented?

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): The right hon. Gentleman was in power then.

Mr. Dorrell: This is a matter not of party politics, but of the health of women in east Devon.

Is it not the case that what has happened in east Devon appears to be a failure of the process of clinical audit? Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the said procedures governing the east Devon service are reviewed? Furthermore, will he ensure that the evidence that emerges from that review is used to improve the clinical audit of other breast screening services? We welcome the right hon. Gentleman's announcement that the chief medical officer will analyse the background to what has happened in east Devon. Will he undertake to publish that report when it is available?

Mr. Dobson: I shall start with the last question. It is my intention that, once I can verify the facts rather than rely on newspaper reports, all that information is made available to the public, and in particular to people in the south-west.

As for the numbers involved, as I have already explained, the trust is not capable this afternoon of verifying that fact. As I have already said, that in itself is a matter for concern.

I must tell the right hon. Gentleman that the clinicians did know about the matter, because it was they who expressed concern in February about the incidence of cancer among women who had been screened and who had been told that they did not need immediate treatment. The clinicians have been in the picture since February.

As for the record of treatment in east Devon, it is partly because of that background that I am so determined to have a thorough inquiry into what has gone on down there in the years leading up to May this year.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): First, I associate my colleagues from the south-west and elsewhere with the strong expression of concern from the Secretary of State. I thank him for his clear statement.

May I ask that the review should consider three things that are not concerned with Devon specifically, but which relate to breast screening practice in general? First, will there be resources to provide competent staff who are adequate to the task—radiographers and radiologists—as well as the equipment in all places where screening is carried out? Secondly, will the Calman recommendation be implemented so that the work of widespread screening is matched by that of a breast unit, which will carry out further diagnosis? Thirdly, an obvious point for lay people relates to those who, as in this case, present with clear symptomatic evidence of potential concern, for example, lumps. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the screening process is not the end of the exercise, and that in every case women who contact the health service who are concerned about possible breast cancer are treated and not put behind the queue of women waiting for routine screening? There should always be a second opportunity to look at anyone who presents with any sign of potential breast cancer. It would offer great reassurance if those factors could be considered.

Mr. Dobson: On resources, as a result of our decision not to go forward with the eighth wave of fundholders and the saving of £20 million in bureaucratic costs, by the end of this month, the first £10 million of that will be available to breast specialist centres throughout the country. Under the Calman/Hine proposals, which are gradually being implemented, a full range of services is available for those who suffer from cancer. It was not just a question of mammograms. Some women who were diagnosed as not needing treatment had had physical examinations, which failed to pick up evidence that should have been picked up.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that the private notice question deals specifically with one region and one national health service trust. Therefore, it is limited and I shall call first those hon. Members whose constituents are involved.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): You will be aware, Madam Speaker, that I have asked for an Adjournment debate on this subject. Notwithstanding the Minister's statement, I should still like that request to be considered, because many issues that we wish to discuss cannot be dealt with in the short time that is available today.

The Secretary of State may wish to write to me on the following matter. As Wonford hospital was not long ago identified under the Calman recommendations as a specialist cancer centre, and in view of what we have heard about the way in which women patients have been treated there, could the right hon. Gentleman make some inquiries about the analysis that was made when Wonford was put forward as a specialist cancer centre, in the context of the treatment at that time in the breast care unit there? It would be a matter of great concern if that hospital were following different practices from other hospitals,

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

because the purpose of Calman was to take best practice throughout the country and regionalise it. I share with the House the fact that I have been a patient of that unit for some years and therefore share the concern of my constituents about what has happened there in recent years.

Mr. Dobson: I appreciate that the hon. Lady's points arise from her direct experience, and that is probably as good a reason for having locally elected Members of Parliament as any that I have ever heard in the House. It is certainly the intention to try to spread best practice. However, one of the criteria for deciding where a cancer centre should be located is a good geographical spread. I do not think that we would wish to say that some hospitals should not be used as specialist cancer centres because they have had shortcomings. The object must be to make sure that there are no future shortcomings.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South–West Devon): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) on raising this matter, and I thank the Secretary of State for Health for the way in which he is dealing with it. In view of the anxiety in Devon on this important matter, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can answer two questions. First, can he reassure me and my constituents that the problem does not relate to women who have had breast screening at Derriford hospital in Plymouth, but relates specifically to the one in east Devon and to other private hospitals in the east of the county? Secondly, in view of that concern and in the context of the track record of this unit, will he think again about his action on the matter and consider going straight to a full, independent inquiry, so that the truth can be exposed and public confidence can be restored?

Mr. Dobson: I shall have to be careful that I do not raise concerns that do not need to be raised. To the best of my knowledge, the shortcomings have been, in the national health service, in the Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS trust and the South Devon Healthcare NHS trust, and in some private hospitals across Devon. As far as I know, I am glad to say that the problem does not affect Derriford hospital.

The hon. Gentleman asks about an inquiry. As I said at the beginning of my statement, I am determined to get to the bottom of the matter, and I shall not hesitate to use my statutory powers to set up and carry through an independent inquiry if I judge that to be necessary after I have received a preliminary report from the chief medical officer. As I have said, if I am as dissatisfied after I receive that preliminary report as I am now, I shall certainly set up an independent inquiry.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I thank my right hon. Friend for his swift action in this matter and assure him that the women covered by that trust will be very grateful indeed, as will women all over the country. However, I point out to him that there is another group of women—older women who are not on the recall cancer screen—who would be grateful if the current pilot scheme were speeded up in some way.

Mr. Dobson: I take my hon. Friend's point—she has been very active in this field, to her great credit. I hope that the chief medical officer's general review of breast cancer screening provision will take her concerns into account.

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): My right hon. Friend spoke of the matter being referred to the centre in Nottingham on 1 April and a report coming from that centre on 28 May. Is not that an undue length of time, given the urgency of action when someone's false diagnosis is revealed?

Mr. Dobson: I do not know whether it is a customary length of time, but, as far as I am concerned, it is a wholly undue length of time and cannot possibly be tolerated any further.

Points of Order

3.50 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. At the end of last week, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made two important policy statements, one with regard to specified ovine material and the other with regard to a possible policy of prohibiting the import into the United Kingdom of European beef. Both policy statements are wholly sensible, but the problem relates to whether they should have been the subject of a statement in the House. "Erskine May" is curiously silent as to the principles that govern the making of statements by Ministers. You, Madam Speaker, in your capacity as custodian of the rights of the House would, I feel sure, wish to say that it is important that important policy statements are made to the House by way of statement. I ask you to consider making a ruling setting out the principles that should govern the making of statements by Ministers to the House with regard to policy initiatives.

Madam Speaker: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is aware that no Speaker has authority to command a Minister to make a statement to the House; the Speaker is always told when the Government wish to make statements about policy changes. He refers to an event that took place last week. Perhaps I could remind him and the House that, although I cannot command that a statement be made, I have full authority in determining whether or not I accept or reject a private notice question. I would point out to the House that I have not yet had a private notice question from the official Opposition.

Mr. Hogg: Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I would suggest that it might be helpful if, at a more leisurely moment, you could consider making a ruling setting out the principles that should govern the making of statements.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. I hope that you are not going to take too much dictation from a bloke who spent his time in government over there in the Common Market cocking everything up—almost everything he touched he made a mess of and now—

Madam Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. I listen very carefully to what is said in the House. Perhaps the subject raised by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) is one that the new Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons could consider.

European Union

[Relevant document: The Thirteenth Report from the Select Committee on European Legislation of Session 1996–97, HC36-xiii, on the Draft Protocol on The Role of National Parliaments.]

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

3.52 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. SN 600/97 (C101), consolidated draft Treaty texts; 6946/97, on the strengthening of the surveillance and co-ordination of budgetary policies; 6947/97, on speeding up and clarifying the implementation of the excessive deficit procedure; 10867/96, on the legal framework for the introduction of the euro; 7766/97, on the Commission's recommendation for the broad guidelines of the economic policies of the Member States and the Community; 7767/97, on a progress report on the implementation of the 1996 broad economic policy guidelines; the draft Resolution on the European Council on the stability and growth pact; and the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 30th May on a draft resolution of the European Council on the establishment of an exchange rate mechanism in the third stage of economic and monetary union; and welcomes the determination of Her Majesty's Government to focus the agenda of the European Union on policies of direct benefit to the peoples of Europe through its initiatives on employment and competitiveness, and to obtain the best deal for Britain at the Amsterdam Summit through constructive negotiations in the Intergovernmental Conference.

It is now only six months since our last debate before a European summit, but it is, of course, not those six months but the past six weeks that have transformed the nature of today's debate. It was only five weeks ago that many Conservative Members, hoping to escape the wrath of the electorate, stood not as the party opposed to new Labour, but as the party opposed to Europe. I say many, but many more tried it than are able to take their seats with us here today. One of the great newspapers in our land, whose recent change of tone requires us to speak of it with respect and veneration, published on the eve of the election a list of all those Conservative candidates in its roll of honour in the battle of Britain against Europe. It published 308 Conservative candidates' names. Two hundred and thirty-four of them were rejected the next day by the British people.

I read today that the Conservative director of communications has let out the information that the former Prime Minister

"pined during the campaign to take a more positive tone on Europe, but held back because he was afraid it would send the Euro-sceptics into orbit."

He must feel wry satisfaction that the electorate sent them into orbit much more satisfactorily than he ever did.

In the five weeks since then, the air has been heavy with the sound of pennies dropping. I am delighted to see the former Health Secretary with us today, supporting his favourite candidate for the leadership of the Conservative party. The former Health Secretary staked out his leadership bid before the general election by signalling that he was as Euro-sceptic as the rest of them. Yesterday, I read that he now supports the former Chancellor. The article appeared under the headline, "Forget Europe: back Clark".

[Mr. Robin Cook]

I hope that the rules of the Tory leadership election allow me to mention one leadership candidate without naming them all.

The more intelligent Opposition Members have grasped the fact that they were too busy listening to their own prejudices to hear the voice of an electorate who wanted a Government who could deliver in Europe and speak with a single, clear voice in Europe. The new Labour Government are now doing that.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, on his first meeting with the heads of the other European Governments, our Prime Minister said that he had learnt on the doorstep, as every candidate had, throughout the general election, of the visceral hostility of the British people to any further movement towards a Federal Europe?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman anticipates what I shall say later, because one of the things that those of us who have gone to Europe have learnt is that there is also a change of opinion in Europe. As it happens, when I first went to Europe, the first European politician I met was Lionel Jospin. In retrospect, that appears to have been a shrewd investment, because a Europe once dominated by the right is now dominated by the centre left. When we enter the Amsterdam summit, there will be nine Prime Ministers there from parties of the left and of the centre left.

I know that Conservative Members find the concept of a sister party strange; they have none, and none is queuing up to fill that role on the continent. The National Front of France is the only party on the continent that shares the Conservatives' opposition to the social chapter, repeated in today's amendment. Let me help them with that concept.

We do not share a programme with the parties of the left and of the centre left in Europe: we are different parties, in different countries, with different electorates. Unsurprisingly, therefore, we have different policies. However, we have shared values of fairness, democracy and opportunity. We have a common approach to international relations, based on co-operation rather than isolation. Above all, we have a common priority in recognising that at present, the No. 1 priority of the Governments of Europe must be to tackle the mass unemployment that has left 18 million out of work in Europe and 9 million in deep social exclusion.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex) *rose—*

Mr. William Cash (Stone) *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I give way to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), because the sooner we deal with his intervention, the better.

Mr. Cash: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with Mr. Jospin about the stability pact?

Mr. Cook: Mr. Jospin has expressed a view today at ECOFIN, and the view expressed at ECOFIN on behalf of the Labour Government was a view put forward by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. At that meeting, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has emphasised that ECOFIN must now put growth and employment first, and his proposal—a five-point package to put jobs at the head of ECOFIN's agenda—has this afternoon been agreed by ECOFIN and will be included in the conclusions of the Amsterdam summit.

The past few weeks have changed the colour of Europe politically, which means that the new Labour Government have allies. That successful initiative also shows that new Labour can take the opportunity to provide leadership in Europe.

I welcome the fact that the former Prime Minister will respond to this debate. May I remind him that in the last election he authorised a newspaper advertisement that lampooned Chancellor Kohl and the present Prime Minister as a ventriloquist and his dummy? We understand now that it was drafted on the back of an envelope by the former Deputy Prime Minister and is therefore of a piece with many of the last Government's policies. It will not have escaped the former Prime Minister that, last Friday, the Prime Minister met Chancellor Kohl. None of the press reports of that meeting portrayed the Prime Minister of Great Britain as a puppet. On the contrary, they all said that he spoke with at least equal authority to Chancellor Kohl and possibly with a little more confidence that he will still be around in the long run. Even the German newspapers reported the Prime Minister of Great Britain as a rival to Chancellor Kohl for leadership of Europe.

That press advertisement demeaned not just the former Prime Minister's opponent in the general election but the leader of another major European country. It was one of the lowest points of the election campaign. It was all the more irresponsible because, we learn today, by then the former Prime Minister knew that the game was up and the election was lost. I do not invite him to apologise when he rises to speak from the Dispatch Box. To demand that he apologises would be confrontational and New Labour is not into confrontation. However, I should like to tempt him, in these his swan song days, at least to admit that he would have welcomed the opportunity to speak to Chancellor Kohl with at least the same authority, without constantly being undermined by the knowledge that it would provoke division on his Back Benches.

Another change occurred in the past few weeks within Europe. It was anticipated by the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Sir P. Tapsell) in his intervention. In the past five weeks, I have had bilateral meetings with every Foreign Minister of the other member states. I spent three days in talks with those Foreign Ministers and sat through the summit of Prime Ministers at Noordwijk.

I can report to the House that there is a deep hunger in Europe for an agenda that puts the institutions of Europe back in touch with the peoples of Europe. There is a growing impatience with an agenda dominated by tinkering with the structure of those institutions, which reflects the concerns of the top politicians of Europe rather than the people who elect them. That is why at Noordwijk my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister called for a people's Europe that addresses the worries and concerns of our electorates on jobs, the environment, crime and social exclusion.

I note that, at the weekend, the Esperanto society made another push for a single language understood by everyone throughout Europe. I am bound to say that it

is a more formidable undertaking than creating a single currency. My immediate worry, however, is that the European Union is now spawning a jargon about institutions, which is understood by no one outside those institutions.

One of the matters for debate at Amsterdam is whether some of the confidences in pillar 3 should jump to pillar 1. At Noordwijk, one of the European leaders complained that he had just met a constituent who had been reading about that and wanted to know how the Prime Ministers of Europe went about pillar jumping at the summits. We are dealing with a series of topics that do not connect with the lives of our people and we are discussing them in terms that they cannot understand.

The European project, built around integration for its own sake, now has only a dwindling audience. More and more, the leaders of Europe judge proposals not by the test of whether they will deliver integration of our countries but on whether they will deliver real benefits to our countries. The Prime Minister caught that mood last week in Sweden, when he said of a single currency:

"The first priority must be not to integrate the economies of Europe, but to strengthen the economies of Europe."

I know that the single currency was a source of grief to the former Prime Minister at the general election, when his wait-and-see policy was reinterpreted by 600 Conservative candidates as a say-what-you-like policy. I say that with some authority, as I read all 600 election addresses. I thought that the finest attempt to marry the private views of a candidate with the official line was that of David Shaw, formerly of Dover, who signalled the degree to which his mind was open on the single currency in the sentence:

"I shall listen very carefully to all the arguments for and against a single currency. Then I shall vote against it."

After the gyrations that Conservative Members went through during the election to fudge their policy on the single currency, it takes a touch of nerve for them to table an amendment today that refers to "fudged criteria".

I assure the former Prime Minister that we have no intention of signing up if our final conclusion is that the criteria have been fudged. We reject the choice that is emerging between a soft euro, which is unworkable, and a hard euro, which is unpopular. We have made it clear that if Britain is to join the single currency, first, that currency must be credible and, secondly, it must win the consent of the people. That is why we will take our decision on the basis of a hard-headed assessment of economic reality and we will give the people a referendum, so that they will have the final veto on whether Britain will join.

At present, we do not know whether there will be a single currency to join in 1999. There is, indeed, an interesting debate in Europe. What is valuable about that debate, and what Britain can usefully help to further, is the gathering consensus that the prime objectives of economic policy should be growth, employment and competitiveness, and that the single currency must be judged on whether it will help or hinder those objectives.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The Foreign Secretary has given a helpful explanation of the Government's approach. Does he recognise that businesses are faced with practical decisions about when to make investments, depending on whether or not we are in the single currency? Can he tell us at what point the British Government will be able to say definitively when we would join and under what circumstances?

Mr. Cook: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is no secret. We must make a decision in time to apply by spring 1998 if we wish to be in that first wave. Therefore, as the hon. Gentleman can see, we must make a decision somewhere around the turn of the year or very early next year.

I was explaining why the Amsterdam summit comes at a creative moment in the history of the debate within Europe. New Labour goes to the Amsterdam summit in a constructive spirit of partnership, not the sterile spirit of oppositionalism, in which Conservative Members so often travel to Europe. Because of that, we will be listened to with respect. We have established Britain as one of the main players in Europe, no longer heckling from the sidelines. The Order Paper today makes it plain that Opposition Members are still firmly rooted on those sidelines. The amendment repeats their routine opposition to both the social chapter and the employment chapter.

Let us be clear about the matter. The British Government have resolved to opt into the social chapter because we believe that that is right for Britain. We did not do it, as some suggest, as some kind of concession to Chancellor Kohl. We did it for the British people, because the Government do not accept that the British people should have worse rights at work than people on the continent—often people on the continent who work for the same firms that employ people in Britain.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the Foreign Secretary concede that, with the Government's huge majority in Parliament, everything that he hopes will be delivered by the social chapter could have been passed by his Government? That would have been in the traditions of his party. Why does he want to abdicate responsibility for those matters to Europe?

Mr. Cook: As I said earlier, there has been a change of tone. We are no longer told that the social chapter will be damaging to Britain. The Conservatives, chastened by the experience of an electorate who want the social chapter, now suggest that we should do it ourselves. I shall return to the hon. Gentleman's comments later.

We need European legislation on some issues because we are dealing with companies that operate throughout Europe. That is why we need a European directive and European works councils. The only people who are likely to lose their jobs as a result of the social chapter are those Conservative Members of Parliament who told their electors that they would derive no benefits from the social chapter. Those Members of Parliament are free to join their former Conservative colleagues on the boards of the many British companies that have implemented the social chapter. Douglas Hurd, the former Foreign Secretary, is director of the NatWest bank.

Mr. Gill *rose—*

Mr. Cook: I have answered the hon. Gentleman and I must continue my speech. If he listens, he may find it interesting. The NatWest bank has a European works council under the social chapter. Lord Howe is director of

[Mr. Cook]

BICC plc, which has a European works council under the social chapter. *[Interruption.]* There are some objections to the examples that I am giving. What about Lord Tebbit—surely no one could query his scepticism about Europe. Yet while Lord Tebbit was a director of BT, it introduced a European works council under the social chapter.

Richard Needham, Sir Geoffrey Pattie and Lord Prior are directors of General Electric Company plc—between the three of them, they must have at least a blocking minority. However, while they served on the board of GEC, it implemented the social chapter and introduced a European works council. Why should we take the Conservatives seriously when they tell us in this place that the social chapter is bad for companies and for employment, but do not take those comments seriously when they sit in company boardrooms?

Mr. Bernard Jenkin: I congratulate the Government on resisting the imposition of works councils for smaller businesses. How will the Foreign Secretary stop that occurring with qualified majority voting?

Mr. Cook: I think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the consultation document that was released last week. It is aimed not at Governments but at the social partners. Because Britain is joining the social chapter, the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the Federation of Small Businesses have the opportunity to express their views. Ministers will then give their views. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have the confidence to enter negotiations and express our views in order to achieve the desired outcome: fair rights for those in work and regulations that do not damage competitiveness.

The Opposition amendment also opposes the employment chapter. The employment chapter is a modest, sensible step, which requires the institutions of Europe to identify the employment consequences of any policy before adopting it. I am pleased to inform the House that, unlike the previous Administration, the new Labour Government have obtained an amendment to the first article of the employment chapter. It recognises the fact that, if we are to increase employment, we must improve employability and increase the flexibility of the labour market. Article 1 of the employment chapter now commits the European Union to promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable work force, and labour markets that are responsive to economic change.

Only a Conservative party that is wildly out of touch with popular opinion or the public's desperation about job insecurity could regard that modest objective as a threat to Britain's national interests. On the contrary, it meets one of the main concerns of the British people. That is why the new Labour Government will support it. Precisely because the Government are not shouting no to everything out of prejudice, we are listened to with respect when we do say no to issues that threaten Britain's national interests. This time, our fellow European leaders know that we really mean it. For that reason, we shall get a better deal at Amsterdam than the Conservatives could have done.

There are seven days of tough negotiations in front of us before the Amsterdam summit and there will be three days of hard bargaining at Amsterdam. I am confident that we have every opportunity of obtaining several objectives. The first is a legal basis beyond challenge in the European Court of Justice for Britain to maintain its external border controls, which the Conservative Government never secured in 18 years.

Secondly, we can secure measures that will create tougher provisions against fraud in other member states. I cheerfully concede that the proposals that we have tabled are based on qualified majority voting, for the simple reason that if every country had a veto, no country would ever suffer a penalty for fraud against the European budget. Will the former Prime Minister defend as a matter of principle the right of every country in Europe to retain a veto against penalties for allowing fraud in that country? Does he not recognise that the issue is a clear example of majority voting being in Britain's interests?

Thirdly, I believe that we can look forward with confidence to obtaining more votes for Britain and the larger countries from the Amsterdam summit. Enlargement could create the perverse outcome of the three largest nations, with a majority of the population of Europe, not having a blocking minority in the Council of Ministers. We have every reason to believe that we shall emerge from Amsterdam with an agreement that will give Britain greater weight in the Council of Ministers.

Finally, we are confident that we can emerge from Amsterdam with a text that will retain the national veto over issues of common foreign and security policy. We can return from Amsterdam not just having done a deal, not just having done a good deal for Britain, but having obtained a better deal for Britain than the previous Government could have hoped to achieve.

Our next debate on a forthcoming European summit will be six months from now, on the eve of the next British presidency of Europe, which starts in January. The main concern of that British presidency will be to get negotiations on the enlargement of Europe off to a flying start. One of the great ironies of the truculence of Conservative Members about Europe is that every other country in Europe is queuing up to get on a bus that Conservative Members often sound as though they want to get off. It is important to remember why other countries want to get in. They want to share in the prosperity that they can obtain from access to the largest single market in the world—larger than any in north America.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that one of the main reasons why so many countries are determined to try to get in reflects badly on the European Community, which has deliberately tried to block all access to trade for those countries for the past four or five years? That hard stick tactic has ensured that those countries have not had a chance to negotiate for reasonable and decent access, forcing them to come in regardless of the conditions.

Mr. Cook: The anxiety of those countries to enter the European Union goes back well beyond the past four or five years. I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point about the narrow negotiations on trade access, but he should be under no illusions. Even a more liberal approach to trade access would in no way have removed the anxiety of those countries to be a full part of the single market and participate in the decisions that

shape that market. They want in because it is the largest single market in the world. That market is of great importance to Britain—a fact which the hon. Gentleman often overlooks.

Most of our exports go to the other member states of the European Union. Britain exports more to the Netherlands than it does to all the tiger economies of the far east. We export more to Denmark than we do to the whole of China. That is the scale of the European single market, and the countries of central Europe understand that full well even if Opposition Members do not. Secondly—

Mr. Duncan Smith: So what?

Mr. Cook: If the response to all that is, "So what?", the Conservative party has finally conceded any last claim to be a party that understands business.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No. I have already said that I will not give way again. I have given way to the hon. Gentleman already.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman can respond to his hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) in the Tea Room. He does not need to do so during my speech, with the greatest respect.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: No. I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman and I have already said that I now wish to conclude my speech. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will let me proceed.

The other reason why the countries of central Europe wish to join is that they want the stability that comes from the mutual confidence of membership of the European Union. We have learnt a paradox that would not have been understood by our grandfathers: if we dismantle barriers between us, if we allow the free movement of goods and if we make people free to travel and to work across those frontiers, we end up with much greater security than we ever had when we built and armed frontiers between us. Those are the reasons why those countries want to come in.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Before those countries are given membership of the European Union, should we not seek to strengthen the role of national Parliaments and the European Parliament vis-à-vis the European Court of Justice, the Council and the Commission?

Mr. Cook: I assure my hon. Friend that we will, indeed, make proposals for greater scrutiny of European legislation by, particularly, the national Parliament of Britain. As my hon. Friend is aware, the House will shortly set up a Committee that will look at the procedures of the House. It will be our intention to submit to that Committee a paper outlining ways in which we can improve our scrutiny of European business. We can take no satisfaction from the fact that European business in the House is often regarded as a specialist area, which is shunted off into Committee Rooms upstairs and not adequately surveyed. If we want to do our task properly, we must improve our procedures for better scrutiny.

I have explained why the countries of central Europe want to be members of the European Union. It is, however, important that we also remember why we want them in. We want them in because Europe can never enjoy security if it is surrounded by a zone of poverty just outside its walls. We want them in because if we wish to provide a clean environment for our people, we must tackle the pollution and emissions from our neighbours. We want them in because if we want to make our country safe from crime, we need them to help and to co-operate in curbing organised crime which knows no borders and is integrating far faster across frontiers than the European Union ever will.

The reasons why those countries want to come in and the reasons why we want them in are the same reasons why Britain should want to be a prominent member of the European Union. Together with other member states, we can do much more for our people than we ever could standing alone. I see no sign of recognition of that in the amendment tabled by the former Prime Minister and his right hon. Friends.

If new thinking is going on in the Conservative party in the wake of its defeat, it is hard to spot it on today's Order Paper. The amendment does not list a single positive opportunity that could be taken in Europe, but it comes up with a list of threats from Europe. That is the key difference that we see between ourselves and the Opposition. We see the European Union as an opportunity; they can only see it as a threat.

What I find most depressing about the Opposition's stance is what a tim'rous, nervous wee beastie is their version of nationalism—a Britain constantly in fear of the continentals coming up with something threatening and constantly clinging for comfort to a veto in case anyone proposes a change. I believe that the British people are a proud, self-confident, assertive people and that they deserve a Government who also have confidence—the confidence to offer leadership in Europe, to shape the agenda of Europe and to choose new directions for Europe. That is what the new Labour Government offer Britain and that is the spirit in which we shall go with confidence into the Amsterdam summit.

4.24 pm

Mr. John Major (Huntingdon): I beg to move, To leave out from "union" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"and warns Her Majesty's Government against signing up to the third stage of economic and monetary union based on fudged criteria and against proposals at the forthcoming Amsterdam summit which threaten British national interests, namely: surrendering the United Kingdom's veto in social policy, industry policy, environment policy and regional policy; signing the Social Chapter and supporting a new Treaty Chapter on Employment; and, instead, recommends that the Government adhere to the approach outlined in the White Paper 'A Partnership of Nations' (Cm 3181)."

I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on his first substantial speech at the Dispatch Box. As our debates and discussions on the European Union develop, he will

[Mr. John Major]

find that I agree with much of what he has said. However, as he gains greater experience in negotiating with our European colleagues, he will realise that some elements of his speech represent a slightly more starry-eyed approach to the process than he will take when he has been negotiating in Europe for a brief time.

In a few days' time, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary will go to Amsterdam to negotiate a treaty on behalf of the United Kingdom. They will certainly have a great deal of negotiating capital in their pockets, because they are new and our European colleagues are always prepared to give a certain amount of leeway to a new Government, from whichever country, and because they have already given away so much, as our European partners wished, that they are bound to be well received. Those who appear with their hands up and a white flag flying are always likely to be well received.

The substantive question is what the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary will obtain for the United Kingdom and for Europe as a result of the concessions that they have already signalled in advance of the commencement of serious negotiations. In many ways, the Amsterdam treaty is unnecessary. Very few people want it and it is likely to do more harm than good; none the less, the negotiations are extremely important.

Recently, the Prime Minister asked a question that I have asked on many occasions in the past few years: is the European Union going in the right direction? He answered that question: frankly, no. I agree. That is my answer too, as it has been on many occasions in the past. In some ways, but by no means all, not only is the Community not going in the right direction; it is actively going in the wrong direction. Amsterdam could correct that or worsen it. Some of the omens, but by no means all, are not good.

This afternoon, the Foreign Secretary gave us a partial guide to the Government's position. I appreciate that, on this occasion, there has not been time for the Government to produce the customary White Paper that precedes our debates on these matters. However, I hope that in his reply to the debate the Minister will confirm that the Government intend to revert to that practice in future.

Much of the significance of the Foreign Secretary's speech lay as much in what he did not say and what was not in his speech as in what he said. There is much in the broad stance of the Government with which I agree. That is hardly surprising, because much of it seems very familiar. Some of what the Prime Minister has said in recent days and the Foreign Secretary's speech this afternoon I could have written myself. Indeed, time and again, as I flick through the speeches that I have made on the subject in the past few years, I find that I did write it. It is attractive, although perhaps somewhat surprising, to hear that echo from the present Government.

Let me touch on the proposals on which we can agree in principle with the Foreign Secretary, although there will be some caveats as to how they might be achieved and what the price might be.

The Foreign Secretary told the House that he would seek a legal basis to retain our border controls. That must be right, and he will have the support of the Opposition. However, it was not right for the Foreign Secretary—perhaps he was misreported—to hail that as the new Government's first European victory. He again indicated this afternoon that it was never achieved by the previous Conservative Government. I say to the Foreign Secretary with all friendliness that that is both a contentious and a premature claim.

The claim is contentious because the principle, which is all the Foreign Secretary has thus far obtained, was conceded by the Dutch presidency to the former Government in March. It is premature because the details, which will be vital in nailing down the agreement, have yet to be settled—as does whether there is a negotiating price to be paid for what our partners will see as a concession to the United Kingdom. I shall return to that point in a moment.

I agree without reservation with the Foreign Secretary when he refers to the need for job creation across Europe. There are 18 million unemployed people. I refer him to speech after speech that I made in the European Council on precisely that point. The Government's intention is plainly sensible. The Foreign Secretary will, however, find a vast difference between agreeing that in principle with our European partners and agreeing in detail with our European partners on how that job creation is to be brought about.

Many of our partners will not agree with the flexible markets to which the Prime Minister has rather latterly become converted. I am delighted that he has so converted and that he is going to tackle obstacles to job creation and labour market flexibility. Hallelujah to that, say we all. It is a breathtaking conversion to Conservative principles. It would perhaps be grudging to remind the Government of what they said in opposition; suffice it to say that our old policy in government on flexibility and open markets now seems to be the Government's new orthodoxy. They have shed all their past beliefs and oratory.

Whether the Government change their minds on the substance may be quite a different matter. How can the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister talk of labour market flexibility with a straight face when they propose to accept the working time directive, sign the social chapter and flirt with Europe's employment policies, which have led to three decades of job losses? Their ability to say such conflicting things at the same time will strike most people with astonishment.

The Government also propose, as does the Conservative party, enlargement of the Community. Again, that must be the right proposition. The EU as at present is incomplete in size. It cannot possibly be complete until we meet what I believe are our historic obligations to countries such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, and indeed others. The sooner they can be brought in and we can extend the free-market sphere—which has its own security implications further eastward across Europe—to provide greater security for future generations than their fathers and grandfathers ever dreamed of, the better it will be for everyone. The Government will have our strong support in seeking to do that. Within 10 years, as the result of the agreements previously reached, the EU should have grown to 25 or 26 members as diverse in size and international interests as Germany, France and the United Kingdom on one hand, and perhaps Cyprus on the other.

To my mind, enlargement is far more important and relevant to the livelihoods of people in this country and across all of Europe and far more worth while than

ambitious plans for more centralisation and communitisation, or for that matter the establishment of a single currency. It needs to be understood that enlargement will fundamentally change the very nature of the EU. It will require a flexibility in institutions, and in practice that does not exist at present.

Enlargement will compel root-and-branch reform not only of institutions, which will certainly be discussed in Amsterdam, but of some of the EU's practices—most obviously of all, the common agricultural policy. That would quite plainly be unaffordable were the EU to be extended in the way proposed. If we are serious in Europe about enlargement, we must be equally serious about a proper, fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy—although I must tell the Foreign Secretary that he will find huge resistance to that among a number of our EU partners.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary should make it clear in Amsterdam that they do not believe that the treaty and the proposals for enlargement can safely proceed unless we get a commitment from our European partners that they will be prepared for the upheavals that must follow enlargement if that enlargement is to be carried through successfully over the next few years.

What are our partners seeking at the Amsterdam summit? The President of the Commission, Mr. Santer, told us a few weeks ago. He confirmed that Amsterdam will be about further integration; about an end to the single-nation veto; about introducing an employment chapter based on European employment practices; and about increasing the power of the European Parliament, necessarily at the expense of national Parliaments. The summit will be about much else that is unpalatable, as well as changes that are plainly sensible.

The draft treaty also proposes a legal personality for the European Union—the Foreign Secretary did not mention that—which is a change that will move it towards becoming a state in its own right. The change will not establish a European state in its own right—I do not remotely begin to claim that—but it will be a step in that direction. I hope that the Government will oppose that idea. If they do not, the difficulties that arose following the Maastricht treaty—with the intention of having a European citizenship subsidiary to national citizenship—will be dwarfed by the difficulties that the Government will face if they accept the idea of a legal personality for the European Union. That is a thoroughly bad idea.

A legal personality for the European Union would be a bad idea for this country, but, as someone who wishes to see Europe succeed, I can tell the Foreign Secretary that it would be a bad idea for Europe also. The belief among the people of Europe—the citizenry—that the European Union is not working in their interests, as we had hoped it would work, will be magnified by the impression that they are moving closer to centralisation. I hope that the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister will firmly say no to that proposition, although I know the seductive terms in which it will be argued by so many of our European partners.

The draft treaty also proposes an extension of the role of the European Union in asylum and immigration policy. Our partners have long wished to see the free movement of persons, immigration and asylum put into the Community pillar. I am sorry if the Foreign Secretary regards that comment as an example of the Opposition's negative attitude, but the answer to that request must be no. We must not accept that proposal, in whole or in part, and I hope that the Minister who winds up will confirm that the Government will not do so.

I suspect that the Government will be asked to do a deal on immigration and asylum in return for the assurances in the treaty about border controls that the Foreign Secretary mentioned earlier. Again, we should firmly reject any such link. The issues are contentious, but they must be decided in the House if we are to carry the bulk of the British people with us in the decisions that may be taken on immigration or asylum. It would be utterly unacceptable to have those issues determined by qualified majority vote in the Council of Ministers, and for disputes and appeals to be settled in the European Court of Justice.

The Foreign Secretary referred to the proposal to extend qualified majority voting in several areas. I see no proper case for that. I strongly oppose any material increase in qualified majority voting. There may be some tiddler areas in which that is worth while, but not many. Any significant extension of qualified majority voting can be made only at the expense of the authority of the British Government and of the House of Commons.

On that point, the Government have a clear policy of almost full surrender. They have conceded qualified majority voting in regional policy, social policy, environmental policy and industrial policy. They have conceded it without asking anything in return in the negotiations, and they have been offered nothing. No other Government have made such a unilateral concession. Even if the Government thought it was right to do that—I can see that they might—it was folly not to trade what they were prepared to give for what they wished to achieve in the negotiations. That would have been a much more credible and mature policy for our Government to follow, but they have not done so.

The Foreign Secretary was equivocal today—I was not sure precisely what he meant—but he has hinted in the past few days that he may be equivocal about maintaining unanimity on foreign policy. To concede that would be folly. Our policy on foreign affairs should be determined here, with the Foreign Secretary answerable to the House. Where we can work in concert with our partners, let us do so. Let us not have a narrow-minded nationalism that says, "We will not work with you." Of course not. Where we can agree, the collective voice of Europe is stronger. There are ways in which we can improve consensus-making within the EU to develop foreign policy, but to do so by QMV would be a substantial mistake for a big European country such as Britain.

The Government's justification for more QMV was partly set out by the Foreign Secretary earlier. Of course, there are some areas where an extension of QMV would be in the interests of this country, but the balance is very heavily tilted against us if we move towards an extension. That is why we should not do so. The Foreign Secretary explained his case in an interview on "The World at One" some time ago, in which he said:

> "Do we want to have Britain's interests in reforming the European Union vetoed say by Slovakia?"

Why Slovakia, I do not know, but it will do as an illustration. He continued:

> "And if you want reform frankly in many cases you do have to have majority voting to stop one perhaps small nation obstructing progress".

[Mr. John Major]

But what if the country whose interests were threatened was this country? What if Britain's interests were at stake? The Prime Minister once said that he would never be isolated in Europe. He then said that he was only too happy to be isolated in Europe. But what if our interests were at stake? What view would the Foreign Secretary take then? As he will discover when he has experience of negotiating in Europe, the small nations do not tend to block progress, because their interests tend not to demand it. But he will find that the interests of the United Kingdom often do demand it, and to throw that away at the outset of his period as Foreign Secretary would be a grave mistake.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): Does the Leader of the Opposition agree that it was Mrs. Thatcher who, at the time of the Single European Act and the creation of the single market, insisted on the extension of QMV so that the creation of the market could not be blocked by a single country? Are there not other areas where that can be done?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right, and the prize there was worth the sacrifice—the development of the single market. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have praised that decision. But where is the comparative prize now for a further extension of QMV? There is none. If the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary could come back with something as valuable to this country as the single market—the extension of the biggest free market the world has ever seen—I would say, "Yes, by all means extend QMV." Nothing like that is on offer. What is on offer is this country surrendering more of our authority for the convenience of colleagues, with no comparative gain for the United Kingdom.

The Foreign Secretary has illuminated what he is about. He said:

"The terrific potential for a Labour victory is that not only would you have a straight majority of Prime Ministers at the EU summit from socialist sister parties"—

a point he repeated today—

"but you would also then have one of the key players in Europe on their side. With a Labour Government in Britain we could put together an alliance that would enable a different agenda at those EU summits."

Mr. Robin Cook: Very sensible.

Mr. Major: Indeed, but that does not sound like what the Prime Minister has been saying to business men—it sounds nothing remotely like what the Prime Minister has been saying anywhere. What is the "new agenda" that the Foreign Secretary has in mind? To practise socialism abroad while talking conservatism at home? That sounds like an accurate description of what the Government have been doing for the past few weeks.

If that is the case, perhaps it explains why the Government would sign the social chapter and support an employment chapter that will be either pointless if policy is left in national hands—as the Foreign Secretary implied, and as it should be—or damaging if it admits Community employment practices to the United Kingdom. It is odd that, on every measurement one uses, unemployment in the United Kingdom is coming down, but is steady or rising in European countries that operate what is known as the European social model. Nor is that just a short-term phenomenon as a result of the economic cycle: if the Foreign Secretary cares to look over 25 years in the EU, he will find a relentless underlying rise in unemployment, disproportionate to that in comparable countries and in the United Kingdom.

The European Union—broadly collectively the same size as the United States—has created a quarter of the jobs created by the United States since 1950. Most of those jobs were created in the public sector and not the private sector, precisely because of policies that piled more costs on employers and discouraged employment. Against that background, signing the social chapter, aligned with the European social model, will open the door to further job destruction.

I genuinely understand why the Labour party—with its history and instincts—wishes to move in that direction, but it cannot say, "We are in favour of flexible markets," while moving in a direction that will strangle flexible markets and force people out of employment.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): In referring to QMV, the Leader of the Opposition—I will get that right—has talked in terms of the British Labour Government "surrendering" to Europe. How does he believe the French and German Governments talk to their people? They, too, will be subject to QMV. It is a question not of surrender, but of sharing sovereignty in the belief that, if Europe is to progress, we cannot be subjected to what ancient Poland was subjected to at the time of the Liberum veto.

Mr. Major: I will explain where there is a clear distinction. The whole tradition and manner of government in the United Kingdom, and our history throughout much of this century, are almost the polar opposite of those of continental Europe. Our traditions and instincts are different. What is commonplace for those in Europe is not remotely what has been seen traditionally to be in our interests. If QMV is conceded as the Government propose, what is common practice in Europe—from which we have always turned away—will be imposed from Europe on the United Kingdom. That is the distinction. The hon. Gentleman must understand that the traditions and instincts are not the same. That is why we should co-operate, but not be compelled by qualified majority votes.

Mr. Robin Cook: Since the former Prime Minister is developing this matter as a major part of his speech, may I put to him the question that I asked during my speech and which there must be time to answer now? Would he really say to the House that he would insist that the new provisions on fraud should be decided by unanimity? Does he not recognise that, if they were, no one would ever suffer a penalty? If he accepts QMV in that area, will he concede that there are areas where qualified majority voting is in Britain's interests?

Mr. Major: If the Foreign Secretary had been listening, he would have heard me say a few moments ago that there are areas where the extension of QMV is right, but that they are outweighed by the areas that would do damage to Britain.

On fraud, if the provisions were patently sensible, they would be agreed by consensus. They do not have to be imposed by QMV. When the right hon. Gentleman has had experience of negotiating within the EU, he will realise that consensus can be, and is, built on policies that are sensible, week by week. That is a distinction that he may not understand now, but which he will learn once he has spent a few months negotiating with our European partners.

The Labour party is well versed in telling us that much of the social chapter at present is only words and promises, and that is true. At the moment, only two directives have thus far appeared under the social chapter. But that is not the point, and nor is it what will happen in the future. The social chapter, once signed, opens the door to a flood of future legislation. The Government know that, the unions know that and the EU knows it. Mr. Gabaglio, the general secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, blurted out the truth in a clear fashion when he came to Britain. That is the reality. Mr. Gabaglio would like to go back to what he called, "Business as usual". I recall business as usual under Labour Governments—Employment Protection Acts that destroyed jobs, industrial policies that destroyed whole industries and regional policies that laid waste to the region. This month, what the Government will give away will give us those same disastrous policies of the 1970s, but they will be made in Brussels and imposed here by qualified majority vote. That is the reality.

Why do the Government claim that jobs are the bottom line in deciding whether they should join a single currency? Jobs do not seem to be an issue when embracing the European social model. The Government do not seem to care that that would damage jobs and competitiveness, although they surely know that it must. Perhaps the Foreign Secretary or one of his colleagues can reassure the House that, if there were a possibility of losing jobs as a result of signing the social chapter, Labour would rethink. Are jobs as important in signing that as they are in signing up to the single currency? Apparently not. Apparently, it does not matter if jobs are lost as a result of that policy.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend tell us whether he regrets having signed the stability pact, in the light of what he has said about a single currency? In the circumstances, does he think that it would be highly desirable for the Government to repudiate that pact, in the light of the difficulties that it is causing in the rest of Europe?

Mr. Major: It is good to see that the move from being a Government Back Bencher to an Opposition Back Bencher has not changed my hon. Friend. He is as difficult now as he was then. With great respect, he is as wrong now as he was then.

I must move on to the substantive points. Perhaps the Government could also settle a paradox for us. In case their policies on the social chapter worry the business community, their spin doctors have been busy reassuring the House that Labour will pick and choose European social policies; yet the Foreign Secretary knows that much of the social chapter is under qualified majority voting, where picking and choosing is out of the question. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can confirm that he understands that. He is obviously unsighted on that; perhaps his colleague will reply on that point at the end of the debate.

The only effective way to pick and choose is outside the social chapter, by producing legislation under the Government's own domestic agenda—heaven knows, they have a big enough majority. If they think that those policies are right, they should bring them to the House. If those policies work, they can claim the credit; if they do not, the House can repeal them in the interests of job creation and not be stuck with them because they have been imposed from outside. If the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister had no majority behind them, they could not do that. No doubt they could provide an early guillotine to ensure that they get the matter through the House—no doubt, it could be whisked through very speedily indeed if they chose to do so, but they would prefer not to and I think that we all know why.

There is another paradox at the core of the Government's European social policy—another example of their love affair with diametrically contradicting prose. On the one hand, we are told that European social legislation is vital for the workers of this country and that the new treaty chapter will help to create jobs. On the other hand, we—and, more especially, the business community—are assured that neither of those amount to a row of beans. They are symbolic gestures, so business leaders who are getting edgy need not worry. Which is it?

Both roads lead to disaster by different means. The first—more regulation—would hit prosperity and hurt jobs and the second would encourage the Europe of ever-increasing expectations that cannot be met. What then? An excuse for yet more European leaders to call for yet more European powers as a solution to all our ills.

The Foreign Secretary mocked the previous Government's policy on economic and monetary union in his speech seconds before restating it as his policy. Negotiate and decide, making up one's mind when one has the facts—all the buzz words. The right hon. Gentleman did not use them in that fashion, but that was exactly what he meant—wait and see what the facts and conditions are, make up one's mind at the time and do not be committed in advance. Can the right hon. Gentleman not make up his mind even now? The policy that he stated is the policy that he has been attacking month after month. It is breathtaking hypocrisy for the Government to talk to us, first, about the negotiate-and-decide policy and, secondly, about the unity of the party, to which I will return.

The fate of economic and monetary union will overshadow all the other discussions that the Foreign Secretary will have at Amsterdam. He referred to a change of tone in his party. I hope that we will hear such a change of tone as the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) or the right hon. Members for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) speak.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: Not at this moment, if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me. We know his view on a single currency.

Mr. Bruce: It was the right hon. Gentleman's view that I wanted.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman is just about to get it.

The single currency is approaching the point of decision and, perhaps, the point of crisis. The timetable is now unrealistic and the dangerous impact of dividing the Union into those in a single currency and those outside it is becoming daily more obvious. I have raised that matter repeatedly at European Councils and the speeches are a matter of record. The events of the past few weeks—what has happened in Germany and France and the changing circumstances across Europe—mean that economic and monetary union cannot safely proceed on 1 January 1999. Perhaps it can do so later—one can never say never, as has memorably been said—but it cannot on 1 January 1999.

If economic and monetary union goes ahead on that date, it will be not because the economic circumstances are right but because politicians throughout Europe have overcommitted themselves and cannot break away, even though the economic criteria that they set in the Maastricht treaty will not be met. On the information that has recently become available, the United Kingdom should certainly not enter in 1999. I am pleased to see the Foreign Secretary nodding assent to that.

Given the influence that the Foreign Secretary boasted of earlier, however, we should go further. First, in the interests of all of Europe—not just Britain and not just because of what some members of the Opposition might call Euro-scepticism in Britain—and because it would be a disaster if EMU went wrong, we should use the new-found influence of which the Foreign Secretary boasted to press for delay at Amsterdam. I am not asking him to press for cancellation. That will not happen. European monetary union is clearly in the interests of some of our European partners and they are not going to cancel it, so let us not have that pipe dream. Delay, however, we can most certainly press for and we should go further. We should make it clear that, if the other countries do not choose to delay, we will use the vote that we have against each and every country individually that seeks to enter such a single currency if their economies are not suitable to meet the Maastricht criteria and sustain them in later years.

I hope that the Prime Minister will indicate at Amsterdam—as I would have done had I been there—first, that we now believe that delay is in the interests of Europe, to avoid a disaster and, secondly, that if the Union chooses not to delay, we will vote against the entry of those countries that have not met the Maastricht criteria.

I fear two sorts of fudge as we approach the dates for economic and monetary union. The first is a fudge in which some of the larger European nations pretend that they have met the Maastricht criteria when they have done so only with creative accounting. The second is a different sort of fudge, in which the nations change the treaty commitment and weaken the criteria for a single currency so that not only France and Germany can enter, but perhaps Italy, Spain and other countries that desperately wish to be part of the single currency area when it is established.

If EMU takes place on weakened criteria, it will be economically fatal not merely to our European partners but to our interests and it should be opposed. The evidence is now available. The necessary economic criteria cannot be reached by 1999. At Amsterdam, I hope that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary will seek to put a brake on economic and monetary union—not a cancellation, but a brake—because, if it proceeds in the wrong circumstances, it will damage our economic interests and cost us jobs. I delayed saying no until the British interest was clear. It is now clear. We should say no and the Prime Minister should do it at Amsterdam.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The Leader of the Opposition makes an important point about creative accounting, but surely it is an absurd proposition to say that, however close to or far from the Maastricht criteria our partner countries come—even if they are broadly in line—we should veto them. Surely that is what our American friends would call influencing people without making friends. What isolation and animosity the vetoing of partner countries would create in the European Union.

Mr. Major: It is not a veto: the matter is determined by qualified majority voting. I did not mention the word veto: I said that we should cast our vote against those countries proceeding. *[Interruption.]* It is no good the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) waving his arms; he should find out what he is talking about before standing up and saying it. I wish that he would change his oratory, because it is not a question of our trying to be beastly to the Europeans. If they proceed on the wrong criteria and things go wrong, there will be real and damaging economic effects on this country and throughout Europe.

I want Europe to succeed. I do not want much of the work of the past 30 years to be blown away by something that would make the collapse of the exchange rate mechanism look like a vicarage tea party, which is exactly what would happen if countries went into economic and monetary union and it collapsed. How many unemployed people does the hon. Member for Swansea, East want there to be in Europe? Is 18 million not enough for him? It is far too many for us, and I do not think that the risk is worth the potential reward.

A single currency may have rewards at the right time and in the right circumstances; but that is not now.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Leader of the Opposition has said why he thinks that there should be delay, but can he clarify what the shadow Chancellor said this weekend and tell us whether, if monetary union were to go ahead and, in his party's view, it was in Britain's national interest to join, it would still be his party's policy to allow the British people a referendum on the issue?

Mr. Major: I set out some time ago the view that I believed that it was right to have a referendum, and I have not shifted, nor do I expect to shift, from that view. It is a decision unlike any other. It may be decided that it is right to go in. Those circumstances could well exist in the future.

It is not a question only of positive advantages; there could be a negative case in which the disadvantages, in terms of employment and economic well-being, of staying out are compelling. We cannot overlook that possibility, and I never have. That is why I have always refused to rule out entry in principle. One cannot be certain that economic conditions will not be such that entering will be the least bad option.

If such a change is to come about, it is a change of such magnitude that, if it is to carry conviction, it must be endorsed in a referendum on a specific question, which is why the Cabinet that I had the privilege to lead decided on that policy some time ago.

I have dwelt on the negotiations at Amsterdam, so I have not developed the theme of the many advantages that exist from our membership of the European Union. In the absence of my having dwelt on those advantages on this occasion, let no one doubt that they exist and that we are infinitely better off in the European Union, for all the disagreements and squabbles that we occasionally have with our partners, than we would be in splendid isolation outside it.

I believe that my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) was right to take this country into the European Union and I believe that the economic advantages that we have already reaped and that will be reaped in the future, unless we throw them away with foolish decisions, are huge.

We need to press to enlarge and decentralise the Union, to turn it into the economic powerhouse that it could, but has not yet, become. Its potential is almost beyond calculation if the right policies are there to follow the original dreams of the Community's founders.

Of course, we need to work with our partners to maximise Europe's influence around the world, but working with them does not mean having policies imposed on us by them, through qualified majority voting. We need to build on the opportunities that Europe has given us.

I profoundly disagree with some, not all, of the policies of the European Union. I echo again what the Prime Minister said the other day: is it going in the right direction? Frankly, no, but it is a force for good, economically and politically. We should use all our influence as a country to make it a success in the future.

That does not mean only co-operating; it means sometimes saying to our European partners, "We think this is wrong and we ought not to do it," because if we go ahead, and we prove to be right and it is indeed wrong, we could damage the whole European Union.

That is not Euro-scepticism, but a balanced judgment of what we believe is right to ensure that the European Union works. That is what I care about. I want it to work and I want us to play a proper role in it, but I do not want us to be placed in a position in which a more intrusive European Union overrides the instinctive wishes, habits and traditions of the United Kingdom in a way that many in this country have come to fear over recent years. The Prime Minister's remark is relevant in that regard as well.

In that spirit of wishing Europe to be a force for good economically and politically, we should use all our influence as a country to help to make it a success in a way that is appealing, and not unappetising, to the British instinct. In that spirit, I wish the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary well in the negotiations that they must undertake—I can certainly agree that they will be hard negotiations—and, for all our sakes, I hope that they will be wise in what they pursue and successful in what they achieve.

5.5 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I welcome this debate, which takes place in entirely new circumstances. I got the feeling that those on both Front Benches were talking as Europeans. I, too, was born a European and will die a European. It is not really a national matter: we are discussing the future of our continent as we enter the new century. The implications of the decisions that we take are profound constitutionally, politically, economically and socially.

Our cause is not best advanced by talking as though it were a matter of conflict between one nation and another. The history of Europe in this century has been a history of conflict and war arising from nationalism. As I hope to show, if we take the wrong decisions, nationalism could be reawakened.

We have had two wars and the cold war. Fifty years ago, the Marshall plan was designed to strengthen the western European economies. The American ambassador was in the Palace of Westminster the other day and pointed out that the Marshall plan was part of the beginning of globalisation. He said that it was about the containment of communism. The European Economic Community and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation were set up after the second world war to create a western Europe that would be able to perform again its function as a series of capitalist economies and to resist the onset of communism.

There are many people—I think that the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), who I am sure will be speaking later, is one—who look back at that history and say that we must build a political federation in western Europe to ensure that does not happen again. I understand that view, although I have never shared it, and the right hon. Gentleman, who as a young man went to Spain to visit those engaged in the Spanish civil war and who played a notable part in the war, is fully entitled to it.

I want to express some of my anxieties, which have been rather delicately touched on in the debate so far. First, the Europe that is on offer is a deflationary Europe. That is what the stability pact and the Maastricht criteria are all about. There has been much anxiety in local government about the standard spending assessment limiting the capacity of local authorities to spend, but I dread the day when the Chancellor comes to the House and says that a standard spending assessment has been made for Britain and that if we go beyond it we shall be fined under the provisions of the stability pact.

Unemployment in Europe, at 18 million or 20 million, is at an horrific level. It is all very well blaming the continental Governments' policies, but unemployment performs an essential function if we want to achieve what are called flexible labour markets. Without unemployment, wages cannot be brought down. Unemployment gets wages down. If wages are brought down, profits go up and imports are limited. In my opinion, the discipline of unemployment is an integral part of the policy being pursued in the European Community.

I am old enough to remember that Hitler came to power when there were 6 million unemployed in Germany. As a 10-year-old, I bought "Mein Kampf"; I have it on my bookshelf still. The problem is beginning to re-emerge with Le Pen in France. With mass unemployment and despair, it is easy to find scapegoats: the Jews, the communists, the trade unionists. To read what was said by the Nazis before the war and consider how it is being echoed today must make people worry about what is in

[Mr. Tony Benn]

effect the reimposition of the gold standard in Europe in the name of economic stability. The social price is very high.

My second anxiety is that the whole business—to call it a legal personality is only a way of describing it—involves the transfer of power from the people to Governments. That is what it is about. There is a new political class in Europe that has been accumulating, in the name of the European Union, more and more power for itself. I sat on the Council of Ministers for four years. I was president of the Council of Energy Ministers. The laws in Europe are made by a Parliament that meets in secret. When I was made president, I wrote to all the member countries saying that as we were a Parliament that passed laws, we should have it open so that everyone could hear the debates. That was vetoed; they want to meet in secret. In secret, the negotiations and deals can be made more easily. If the press had been present, as *Hansard* is here, a very different perspective would have been seen.

I do not draw a direct parallel, but it has sometimes occurred to me that as communism required a party central committee and commissars, Europe has a central bank and Commissioners. Both have a certain distrust of the exercise of popular power because they pursue in the one case a communist philosophy, and in the other a very ideological free-market philosophy, that require the people to be kept at bay.

We are now discussing also something as important as the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, but these other constitutional changes that the Government are contemplating, which I wholly support, involve the transfer of power from London to Edinburgh and Cardiff at the very moment that we are also discussing the transfer of more essential powers from London to Frankfurt, Brussels and Strasbourg.

One reason why I am not in any way nationalist in my approach is that if the single currency goes ahead, power will be transferred to a central bank that will exercise all the levers of power in economic policy. It is no secret that I have some anxieties about the transfer of power to the Bank of England, but at least I have the comfort that the House of Commons can take it back again. In 1946, the Bank of England Act was passed by a majority in the House of Commons. After that, the Bank became subject to Treasury control. If it can go once, it can come back again; but hand power to Frankfurt and it cannot be retained.

If one thing is sacred for me, as I have said time and again, it is the power of the people by using a pencil on a piece of paper to remove those who made the economic policy that determined their lives. It never ceases to amaze me that people without a policeman in sight can take a pencil, put a cross on a piece of paper, pop it in a box and get rid of a Government: whether the last Government, the Callaghan Government, the Wilson Government or the Churchill Government. That is what democracy is about. Transfer the key decisions to people whom we do not elect and cannot remove and we abandon centuries of struggle by the common people to have some say in determining their future.

One last aspect was not touched on by the Foreign Secretary, but I must mention it: the lunacy of extending NATO into eastern Europe and rearming Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. If the history of this century shows one thing, it is that we do not need rearmament in central and eastern Europe. Think of the people we have rearmed at different times for different reasons. We armed Serbia because Tito was hostile to Stalin; look at the price that was paid in the break-up of Yugoslavia. It is beyond the range of common sense when Europe's problems are so enormous, and when we need jobs and health facilities, to launch an arms drive to re-equip the Poles, Czechs and Hungarians.

I mention that because under our constitution—happily, we are looking at it; I have been interested in constitutional reform for a very long time—the power to extend NATO was taken by royal prerogative. Parliament was never consulted because all foreign relations are dealt with by the prerogative of treaty making. To put it as quietly as I can, I am worried about a deflationary Europe, a centralised Europe, an anti-democratic Europe and a rearmed Europe. Those anxieties in no way relate to Euro-scepticism because if we get it wrong, it will affect every country, not just Britain. It will take away democracy from Germany, France, Italy and the rest.

One reason why this debate is important is that it comes during the aftermath of some important elections. The British general election saw a major landslide which, dare I say it without being confrontational, rejected the policies of the previous Government. I put it no stronger than that. It appeared that those policies did not find favour with the electorate. I do not know whether to describe the French elections as an "old Labour" victory because that might get me into trouble with Excalibur. Lionel Jospin won an election on the basis of creating 750,000 new jobs and a shorter working week. In every country in Europe, people want jobs, full employment—what is wrong with that as an objective rather than a bit of modernisation of skills and training?—a living wage, homes to live in, lifelong health care and education, dignity when they are old, and peace. That is the voice of Europe that we heard on 1 May and in the French election.

We should seek a Europe in which we co-operate without coercion. I have presented to the House twice before, and may again, a Bill that would make it possible for the 47 countries in our continent to co-operate. All the arguments about pollution and the dangers of fraud could be dealt with as well by co-operation as by coercion. It is the fear of failure that concerns me. If this scheme fails, the result will be a recrudescence of nationalism. It is already beginning. *The Sun* had a headline, "Up Yours Delors", a typical Murdoch insult. The problem was not Delors, whom I have known for a long time, or his nationality; it was that the system was wrong. How easy for some editor to turn that into hostility to Germany, France, Spain and Italy when their people suffer from the same problems as we do.

I believe, and I have said it so many times in the House that no one will be surprised, that this is a supremely democratic question. It is about whether the people of Britain, France, Germany and Spain are to be allowed, through their domestic democracies, to get rid of the people who control them. That is not possible within the framework of a politically driven federal Europe. It is not about economics; it is politically motivated. I understand and respect that, but I know it. If that ability were lost, I believe that we would have thrown away centuries of history.

I recognise that these issues divide everyone. It would be a mistake to suppose that the matter could be fitted neatly into party loyalties; the evidence shows that it cannot. When we vote on the matter in the House of Commons, there will, however one puts it, be a free vote. There will then be a free vote in the referendum on the matter. I beg the House not to see the matter, as it so often has in the past, as a choice between those who are pro or anti Europe. It is about democracy or dictatorship. I do not mean dictatorship in its more elaborate and terrifying forms but the right to govern ourselves.

Julius Caesar arrived in 55 BC with a single currency; we still use it. It took Boadicea, the original iron lady, to raise the men of Essex, known then as the Iceni, to fight the seventh legion to try to contain it. That is not the approach that we should take. We should try to ensure that the people of Europe control their own future. Mistakes will be made by any Government; if we cannot correct mistakes through the ballot box, we will have thrown away everything that matters, including all the ideas that have led to the creation of this House and of our democracy in Britain.

5.19 pm

Sir Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): When the Prime Minister took over, he said that the time had come to make a fresh start in Europe. That gave me great encouragement. The Foreign Secretary gave the same indications soon after he took office. It gave me great encouragement because after 18 years the spirit in Europe between other countries and ourselves had deteriorated enormously. The feeling against us was immensely hostile. I thought that if we were now making a fresh start, we might overcome that.

I know full well that my own party has got to make a fresh start after the disastrous election result. If my party decides to go against Europe—to follow the tendencies of some of our friends—that will be the end of our party, certainly for a considerable period. I therefore hoped that my party would show that it now wanted to play a full part in Europe, which would be beneficial to all of us.

The great strength of the Six, when it first began in 1950, was that the major parties in all the countries agreed about the first European Coal and Steel Community, as it then was, and they worked together for it. All the members of the Six knew that the major parties in each country were working for the same end. That, alas, has never been the situation here.

When I made my maiden speech, I appealed to the then Labour Government at least to go into the talks on the Coal and Steel Community, but they refused. They said that it would be a nasty capitalist organisation. In that, I think that their judgment was in error. They also said that they could not take part in an organisation that might be against nationalisation. Again they were wrong; but they took no part and so we were outside—and remained thus for 22 wasted years. We suffered greatly from that, and we suffered when we got into the Community because of our earlier absence. That is what has always worried me about any future developments.

When he got to his conference, the Prime Minister said, "And we will set the agenda." That made me think seriously about what the members of other Governments of the Community would say when they heard the British Prime Minister declaring to a conference, "And we British will set the agenda." That immediately brings forth all the dislike and, at times, hatred of the British because of their claim that they are going to set the agenda.

The Union is a union in which we all play a part. We cannot expect to get our own way all the time and we cannot try to get our own way all the time. That is the secret of success. That is how its members have operated.

As for the speech of my right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister, he will forgive me if I remind him—it is probably unnecessary to do so—that he once said that he wanted Britain to be at the very heart of Europe and that Maastricht was good for us, good for Europe and good for the world. There was a rather different tone in his speech today. That disappoints me because it shows that we have still not got the major parties in this country to agree about our membership of the European Union. That is the essential if we are to be successful and achieve many of our desires.

We must adopt an approach that recognises fully that others may have desires that are different from our own. We must accept them and not say, "No, we British must do our utmost to stop this." Let me recall our attempts to get our own way. Our attempt to change the voting power procedure failed disastrously. We were isolated, just left alone and all the more disliked for it. There have been other examples where we have pressed alone for change and did not get our way. The result, to put it quite bluntly, was that we were humiliated. People then took far less notice of us than they had done. That is a lesson for the current Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary about the way in which they should conduct business in the European Union.

I enjoyed, as always, the speech of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). Today, he gave his usual speech, but with one addition—his comments about the Bank of England. I share his regrets about the position of the bank, but not about the fact that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has introduced a new organisation.

When we negotiated to join the Community finally, and were successful, we wanted and expected the Bank of England to become the central bank for the entire Community. Why did that not happen? Because of the record of the City since then, the record of the bank since then and the fact that people just did not trust the British. Figures produced in the press yesterday show that we have the next to lowest rate of trust of all the countries of the Community. They just do not trust us and therefore the first task of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary is to get that trust restored. That means working with our partners as a union. There is no other way of getting that trust.

We have heard a great deal about the single currency. I do not want to spend a lot of time dealing with it, but I believe that it would be quite wrong to write it off at this stage. That would be absolutely wrong because the French and the Germans are determined to go ahead with it and so are some other countries in the Union. We have heard about the incident in Germany, but the Finance Minister got a vote of confidence with a majority. The President of France and its new Prime Minister have both declared their intention to have a single currency. The French Prime Minister wants it in a different form, but they are determined to have it.

[Sir Edward Heath]

What is happening here? We are completely ignoring the advice and wishes of our industry. It horrifies me that our party above all should ignore industry. The majority of people in the Confederation of British Industry want a single currency. That is true of industry generally, but not so much of small traders, who operate internally and are not affected greatly by it.

My right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister is right to emphasise the dangers if the single currency does not work properly. Naturally, that is so. The dangers are for us in this country as well, however, if it goes well and we are not in it. Then, the speculators will work against us and they will be successful, as they were on black Wednesday. That is the frightening side of it.

It is rather interesting to look at some of the figures for Germany. I find that the word fudge is now being used in the negotiations. That is obviously just a cover for those who never want a single currency, or even the European Union.

The present figures on gold show that the total reserves in Germany are worth $8.80 billion. In the United Kingdom they stand at $5.48 billion. Germany has almost twice the level of reserves as us. One must then consider the price that is set for gold. The total valuation for our gold is $297.8 per troy ounce. The German figure is $92.4. So, the German price is a third of our rate. Why is it a fudge for the Germans then to say that, in the circumstances, they are entitled to raise the figure at which they rate their gold reserves? They are perfectly entitled to do so. How those figures are used is a matter for the Germans to sort out between the central bank and the Government. Calling that a fudge and, similarly, criticising the French is making us untrustworthy to the rest of the Union.

Industry wants a single currency, and if we do not go in when it is created we shall be in the situation we faced when the European Coal and Steel Community was set up. We shall have no part in its development while we are outside the single currency and, whether we like it or not, we shall have to accept what exists when we go in and will not be able to alter it. That is the great danger of saying, "Put it off."

My right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister knows my views on the social chapter. We were absolutely wrong to oppose it, and we are still opposing it in the amendment. Wages councils were introduced by Churchill in 1909 and they existed under every form of Government—Liberal, coalition, Labour, Conservative, national, wartime, Labour, Conservative. Only in the last three years have they been abolished. Could it be said that they were responsible for unemployment? Not at all.

I remind my right hon. Friend that when I left office in 1974, unemployment was 580,000. Contrast that with unemployment in the 1980s and 1990s. What is the point of abolishing wages councils, which prevent the exploitation of labour? Such exploitation is going on now. Let us make no mistake about it: as a result of there being no wages councils, there is exploitation, particularly of the young. That is deplorable, and we cannot be surprised that our colleagues in the European Union do not like it at all.

I come now to the issue of tax. Of course, people asked questions on Europe during the general election. I had them from our business men, who are operating perfectly well in the EU under its regulations. They say, "Why cannot we have them at home?" That is the voice of industry. Business men are horrified and say, "We are suffering in the other EU countries because of what is being said and done in Britain. Cannot you stop that?" That is what industry is finding, and it has said what it wants us to do instead of pressing ahead with other measures.

My last point is about enlargement. We have constantly emphasised that we want it and we also say that we want a change in agricultural policy. That is also said by the Government. What is the wonderful agricultural policy to which we want to move? Labour has always opposed European agricultural policy. We accepted it and our farmers do extremely well from it. What will be put in its place? Are we to go back to subsidies so that there will be a market price and the Government will provide a subsidy? I do not support such a policy and I do not think that at the moment my party could support it.

The question of an agricultural policy becomes acute when we consider the issue of enlargement. It has been said that we should take in the former Soviet territories to the east. My right hon. Friend the former Prime Minister has constantly emphasised, "Wider still and wider," to which the rest reply, "We want deeper still and deeper." What is the justification for the wider option and what are the dangers?

The economies of those former Soviet territories are nothing like those of the countries that are in the Union. I have been to Bulgaria and Romania and to other such countries and I have seen their standard of living. It is well below ours and that of people in the rest of the Union. They have vast spheres of agriculture and wages are one fifth of ours. What will happen if those countries become full members and can export to EU countries? What will happen to our economies? It makes absolutely no sense to say, "Take them in, wider still and wider."

What we must do and what the European Union has always done as a community is to say, "We want to help you and you will be associated with us." We should work out the terms of association for each country so that they suit its requirements and should then make finance and expertise available. Gradually, they would come up to the general level of the rest of the Union. We did that with Spain, Portugal and Greece, which was an associate member for 21 years. Turkey has been an associate member for 42 years and is still not a full member because the rest do not think that the problems of Turkey with its religious divisions can be assimilated into the Union.

It is sensible to say to all the territories of the former Soviet Union, "We will help you. You will be associated and as you develop and match the rest of us you will become a full member." That would make sense to everybody, but, as it is, the other members of the Union see us emphasising, "Wider still and wider," to avoid the obligations that will be discussed at the conference. That is their view of us and nobody denies it.

Those are the Union's present problems. I desperately wish that both major parties were supporting full, heartfelt membership of the European Union because that is what the Union wants. I hope that we get it.

5.36 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I have participated in these debates for some years and have always been rather dismayed by the way in which they

seem to be dominated by the zealots on each side to whom media attention is directed. Those people seem to believe that, despite our long membership, everything about the European Union is absolutely wicked. In this debate, we have not yet heard a speech in that vein, but I was at a Yorkshire business conference on Friday and was horrified by the speech by the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on this subject.

Over the years, I have become a convert. I listened to the speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and remembered the long-distant days of the referendum on the common market when I was on his side. I have spent some years in the House and some years pondering the question, and I have thought again about Britain's interest in Europe and the world and what we want out of Europe. As a result, I have had a significant and radical change of mind. In that respect, I am like other hon. Members. There is nothing shameful about learning and admitting, after mature reflection, that one was wrong. When I was younger, I was wrong about Europe and it is a great pleasure to follow the speech by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), the Father of the House, who has been right on Europe for a long time.

I wish that we could take a little of the passion out of the debate and look at the central issue—that of getting back to basics and asking what is in it for our constituents. We are sent here to represent them, and I know that mine want to see a world in which there is peace and prosperity. I am something of an historian, although not a very good one, and I realise that as the great conflagrations of war recede, people become complacent about what establishes and preserves peace. There has been peace in Europe for more than 55 years, but, in the lifetime of many hon. Members, a European nation was strafing and bombing this Parliament, and European countries were strafing and bombing each other. We should be humble and think about what we have achieved over those 55 years of a peaceful Europe. The EU has played a significant part in keeping the peace in Europe and we should never underrate that. We have also had a relatively prosperous Europe and our constituents want that prosperity to be ensured for the future and for their children.

We live in a changing world. Those of us who take seriously the globalisation of the economy and of competition realise that we cannot maintain our competitive edge and provide the employment and the living standards that our constituents require if we are outside a powerful grouping in Europe. There can be no doubt about that when we look at the competition. Everyone talks about south-east Asia and the emerging Chinese economy, but I still look at the vigorous economy of the United States. One does not have to relax for long to allow a successful American business to take away one's market. All over the world, there are regional groupings that are extremely powerful and enormously competitive. We must be part of a European grouping that can identify the ways in which we can beat off outside competition and the values that we must pursue in order to modernise our economy and remain competitive. We have learnt many of those lessons from our European partners.

Like the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, I have spoken to many business people who compete in the international environment. They have a fairly uniform view. They do not have a uniform view on the common currency, but they are predominantly in favour of economic and monetary union. The strongest view that emerges is that, if we are to compete successfully, we must do nothing to destroy the European Union and everything to strengthen it. Our greatest problem is that we can get that wrong.

I am a pragmatist and one of the things I liked about the introductory speech by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was that it smacked of what I admire about today's Labour party and the spirit with which it was imbued during the election campaign. It is a spirit that I have come to admire in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—a spirit of radical pragmatism. Radicalism goes back to basics and asks, what is the problem? Why do we have a taxation system? Why do we have a welfare state? It does not say that we have always had certain policies—one way of dealing with the economy, the welfare state or taxation—but asks instead, what do we want to achieve?

It is refreshing when a Government can be honest enough to say that what we want out of a taxation system is the prosperity of our nation—the successful wealth creation on which we all depend. What we want is to achieve a welfare state that delivers to the disabled, the sick and the elderly what they need and should be able to expect in a civilised society. We do not want any welfare state in Europe to be one that pays a pittance—a measly welfare payment—to people who hate the Government who give the payment and hate themselves for taking it.

What I admire most about the new approach on the Government Benches is that we turn that same radical pragmatism to Europe and ask, what do we want out of it? Of course, we want peace and prosperity, but we also want more—to be sure that we establish a democratic framework for Europe.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield spoke about losing democracy, but democracy is not like that—it is a far more finely balanced animal. I worry about the framework of Europe, as would any intelligent person, and I want to change much of it, but that is not to say that it is wrong. As a good democrat, I believe that Europe is too Executive-driven—there is far too much power in the hands of the Council of Ministers that is not publicly scrutinised and far too much in the hands of the Commission. There is far too little power in the hands of Members of the European Parliament. We must ensure that that increases. I hope that in Amsterdam positive strides are made towards giving the European Parliament codetermination and enabling organic growth in its power. That must happen.

At another level, we in the domestic Parliaments must start recognising that we are part of Europe and should participate in it. In the years that I have been a Member of Parliament, one of the things about this House that have depressed me most is the number of hon. Members who have never actually visited the institutions of Europe. They criticise, they become zealots about Europe and have great passions on the subject, but they never get involved in it or come to understand it. It is wrong to live in a modern Europe without trying to go to the institutions and talk to other European domestic parliamentarians. It is wrong not to try to do what politicians do best—plot, plan, gossip and organise.

That is the natural role of politicians, but we as domestic parliamentarians and legislators are prevented from fulfilling that role because we have no access.

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

The Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), knows that we have had a long tussle over that issue. He does not believe that domestic parliamentarians should have access to colleagues across Europe; he does not think it important in a democracy and he often slapped me down from the Despatch Box when I suggested that we should have access. Indeed, I remember my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), now the Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage, saying that he felt a junket coming on when I said that we should at least have access to Brussels and Strasbourg.

A few days ago, I read a newspaper article that said that there were so many Labour Back Benchers that we should be given more opportunity to join the Royal Air Force, the Navy and the Army. I have nothing against such schemes and I know colleagues who have benefited greatly from learning how modern defence forces operate; but if we got our priorities right we would make sure that Members of Parliament, both new and not-so-new, learnt about Europe—its institutions and how they work, how the Commission operates, what happens in Strasbourg and so on.

Most colleagues do not even know how many European Union institutions there are or where they are based.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): They should all be in one place.

Mr. Sheerman: Indeed, there should be a physical concentration.

The truth is that in this House there is an appalling level of ignorance about Europe. Some of us on the Labour Benches ran a campaign for more physical access. New Members may not know that as Members of Parliament they can get one trip a year to a European institution. If one goes to Brussels, one cannot return there or go to Strasbourg or to any other European institution for another year. In a European democracy, that is appalling and I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who will be replying to the debate, will agree that Members of Parliament should be given access to European institutions.

To those who say that they feel a junket coming on, I say that those Members of Parliament who do not take an active role in knowing what the Commission does and what is available from the huge range of European policies and budgets to help their constituents are neglecting their duty. The benefits will come to their constituents and to the regions and sub-regions only if they know the system and how to work within it. It is appalling that many colleagues on both sides of the House are not aware of that. It was deeply embarrassing that when, two or three times, I met the previous Leader of the House, Tony Newton, and said, "We badly need more access", the answer was, "I am sorry, but a vast percentage of colleagues do not use the one trip that they are given." That is another indictment of the House.

We need physical access to our colleagues in Europe, starting with proper access to Brussels and Strasbourg. Let us give strong leadership in Amsterdam, urging that a centre be established in Brussels for domestic parliamentarians. Most of the business that we are interested in goes on there, but perhaps we also need such a centre in Strasbourg.

When domestic parliamentarians arrive in Brussels, they should not be forced to beg to use someone's telephone or try to gain access to the European Parliament; they should have a centre to go to. There they could be briefed; there could be meeting rooms and simultaneous translation facilities. If one wanted to hold a crucial meeting on energy policy, education policy or employment policy—on any of the subjects to which hon. Members have alluded—one could meet colleagues and do what comes naturally to parliamentarians—plot, plan and organise.

A greater flow of information is needed. In a technological age, an information age, surely we should have proper communication throughout Europe among the domestic politicians and parliamentarians of the Fifteen. I should have thought that it would be easily done on the net or the web. For less sophisticated Members, why not publish an old-fashioned newsletter, readily available fortnightly or monthly? It could improve communication among the 15 European states and give information about what was happening in the European Parliament.

Today's debate is important because I can feel and hear a different spirit about. Of course, we shall enter European debates, in the Council of Ministers and elsewhere, with our national interest at the forefront, but it makes one hell of a difference if, when our Prime Minister comes in, people look at him and say, "Here is a person who actually believes in the concept and vision of what Europe can achieve for our people in terms of employment and in terms of facing our increasingly competitive future."

I can feel and hear that difference in the attitude of colleagues throughout Europe. They have realised that, although Britain in the European Union is not a pushover—it will fight its corner for every bit of national interest—it starts from the basic principle that the European Union is the type of organisation that will best protect the people of Britain during the next 10, 50 or 100 years.

We must put behind us the days of the old, little nation state. Surely, in one of these debates on Europe, someone will draw attention to the fact that the nation state has not produced everything that we want in terms of the civilised life and, indeed, has given us much of the misery, poverty and unhappiness that we have experienced in the past 100 or 200 years.

I believe in a Government who are fully committed to, and who believe in, Europe. I hope that the Government and this Parliament will believe in full participation of all Members of the House in a positive Europe.

5.53 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): In his opening speech, the Foreign Secretary said that the Government saw Europe as an opportunity, not a threat. From the Liberal Benches, I welcome that positive approach. I believe that, ultimately, the Government will be judged on their ability to deliver.

At the moment, it is not surprising that there are certain contradictions: conciliation is followed by telling Europeans what to do. I believe that someone was reported as saying that Tony Blair occasionally sounded like Mrs. Thatcher, telling them how he was going to sort out Europe. Nevertheless, I believe that the Government's clear indication that they intend to proceed in Europe by constructive negotiation and as participating members

seeking to advance our interests by negotiation and by being constructive, will yield better results than the 18 years of confrontation that have pushed us to the margins of decision making in Europe.

By contrast, the Leader of the Opposition, the former Prime Minister, appeared confused and contradictory in his speech this afternoon. I agree entirely with the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) that in that speech there was a lack of commitment to Europe and a continuing feeling that the Leader of the Opposition must somehow address the two irreconcilable wings of his party. One would have thought that the consequence of the general election might have liberated him from that stress and enabled him to tell us exactly what he thought about this issue, but I regret to say to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup that I think the chapter of Europe is not yet closed as far as the Conservative party is concerned.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) made a speech that we have heard him make many times. Although he certainly does not polarise things in a national sense, he is in danger of doing so in an ideological sense. It is understandable.

The right hon. Member says that, by definition, the European Union is deflationary. I think that by "deflationary" he means that its members have set themselves the object of living within their means and operating budgetary discipline, recognising that one cannot spend money that one does not have and that it is impossible to borrow one's way out of recession indefinitely.

There is room for flexibility in such an approach, but it is not a question of a commitment to stability; it is a question of a commitment to sustainability, to achieve the climate that will secure long-term employment and prosperity by giving people confidence in the economic institutions that we are trying to create. In that context, most of my remarks, as Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman, will be about progress towards monetary union. My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) will address some of the wider issues.

Before I discuss monetary union, I would say that, as a lifelong Liberal and now Liberal Democrat, and admitted supporter of home rule for Scotland and the progress of the European Union, I have never understood why people find those things contradictory. Those who believe that we need to achieve a co-operative Europe that involves all the peoples of Europe must also be aware of the need to conduct decision making at the appropriate level. If people are to relate to a wider Europe, it is important that their own institutions are close to them, so that people may directly shape and influence them, too. That is my simple definition of subsidiarity.

No one is calling for a European super-state. The only people who are calling for, or threatening us with, a European super-state are those who wish to destroy the European Union by creating a bogey that does not exist, so that they can frighten people into opposing the constructive idea of a Europe that is seeking to build institutions to enable us to avoid conflict and achieve progress on a variety of fronts—which cannot be achieved unless institutions are genuinely open and accountable.

To return to the issue of monetary union and to indicate to the Government that we shall support their motion, which is basically innocuous, and not the Opposition amendment, which simply expresses the deep divisions and difficulties in the Conservative party, let me say that it is important to set out some of the key issues that have arisen as a consequence of developments in France, Germany and other EU nations in the context of monetary union.

I wholly reject the Leader of the Opposition's analysis that he can determine now that monetary union at the beginning of 1999 is no longer a viable proposition. That is questionable and he is not entitled to make that assumption. It has been made only because of the convenience that it provides for his party.

The Liberal Democrats take the clear view that membership of a soundly constructed and fully converged monetary union in Europe would greatly benefit the British economy. It would reduce transaction costs for both individuals and companies, encourage trade by reducing exchange rate volatility, and help to secure low interest rates and low inflation. Ultimately, those achievements would boost jobs and incomes in the United Kingdom.

Those are real prizes to be won. In many ways, this country has as much, if not more, to gain than almost any other member of the European Union, not least because in post-war times we have not secured a credible record of stability on exchange rates, inflation rates and inflation. That is one reason why we have been unable to create the climate of sustained investment and growth that we all wish to achieve.

When I intervened on the Leader of the Opposition, I noticed that I struck a spark. Having spoken of the dangers of joining on time, he told the House even more passionately of the dangers of being left outside if monetary union went ahead and worked. We should not lose sight of that. If this country permanently rules out membership, we risk losing foreign direct investment and the City of London risks losing financial interest to other European centres, notably Frankfurt. Had the previous British Government taken a more positive attitude towards monetary union, the European Monetary Institute and the European central bank might have been located in London, not Frankfurt. If monetary union is successful, the fact that the Conservative Government sold out the opportunity for London to be the pre-eminent financial and monetary centre for the whole of an enlarged European Union will go down as one of their greatest betrayals.

We shall therefore certainly lose if we are excluded. We shall also suffer from potentially damaging exchange rate instability, affecting trade with some of our biggest markets. On Black Wednesday, when Britain was forced out of the exchange rate mechanism, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer was reported to be singing in the bath because he was freed from that constraint. Somehow or other, that was supposed to liberate a whole new economic revival. Ironically, three or so years later the exchange rate is exactly where it was the day we were driven out of the ERM. Such volatility makes it extremely difficult for businesses to plan. The removal of that factor would be one of the greatest prizes that monetary union could deliver. It simply would not be a risk that any business would have to analyse.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): Does that mean that the hon. Gentleman thinks that we should have tried to defend the parity of the ERM rather than withdraw?

Mr. Bruce: No. It shows why the Conservative Government mishandled entry to the ERM in the first

[Mr. Bruce]

place. In many speeches in the House before entry to the ERM, it was pointed out that it was in our interest to go in at the right rate. Instead of going in at the right rate, however, we went in at a politically convenient time—the day before a Conservative party conference—to secure a headline about a reduced interest rate, and we paid a heavy price for that political opportunism. As a matter of detail, one reason why the Liberal Democrats called for operational independence for the Bank of England was so that such decisions would not be taken in that way. That was not in the Labour party manifesto, but it is now in the Government's programme.

We should not underestimate the difficulties of achieving monetary union, or the enormous prize that is there to be won. We have always recognised that it is a major project which will not be achieved simply and easily. We said that we would attach conditions to underwriting its success and to British participation. A referendum of the British people on joining monetary union, should it be determined that we should go ahead, is sensible not just to secure democratic assent, although, by definition, that is the prime reason for such a referendum, but for securing market acceptability that the decision is real and unlikely to be reversed at short notice. The trouble is that Britain's posturing in Europe has damaged us so much that people do not believe that a decision taken on one day will not necessarily be reversed in the near future. The great advantage of a referendum is that it secures the decision by giving the British people and the Government consent for the act.

I was therefore somewhat surprised and disappointed that at the weekend the shadow Chancellor appeared to back away from the Conservative party's commitment to hold a referendum. For the reasons stated, we believe that such a referendum is desirable and in the best interests of democracy and long-term security of the decision. Once the Conservative leadership election is over, we may get some clarification from whoever emerges on whether it remains Conservative party policy.

We accept that the convergence criteria must mean what they say. The trouble is that few people know what the treaty says. It allows for a restricted degree of flexibility, in terms of both the criteria and the timing. The criteria should be applied within the terms of the treaty. It is extraordinary that the Leader of the Opposition has decided that he knows better than anyone else what the outcome will be in 12 months' time. At least the Foreign Secretary acknowledged that, although the decision is coming closer all the time, it cannot be clearly assessed at this stage.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup pointed out that, whether or not we agree that the timing of the German proposal for revaluing its bullion was entirely felicitous, German gold is worth a hell of a lot more than ours. It therefore comes a little ill from us to lecture Germany about how securely founded the German economy is to sustain strong monetary union.

We would therefore not support monetary union that was clearly in fundamental breach of the convergence criteria. I hope and believe that nobody would contemplate that. We should make it clear to our partners in Europe that the criteria should be properly addressed by those who will join and those who aspire to join. If those criteria are met, if the decision goes ahead, and if Britain meets the criteria, it will certainly be in Britain's interest to be in on the ground floor. That is why it is also important to have a clear understanding of the stability pact. It is no good having a set of criteria that determine who qualifies then allowing countries to go their own way. There must be continuing disciplines to ensure good, sound economic management. They should not preclude Governments' rights to set their own tax or spending levels. They should prevent them from borrowing excessively, which is a good external discipline, but should allow countries to pursue their own policies, provided that they are within those broad economic criteria.

Having achieved the disciplines of convergence, it is essential that nations stick to the criteria. It is also essential that sovereign nations retain maximum flexibility over domestic fiscal policy, which means that there must be maximum fiscal subsidiarity. It is not necessary for the terms of monetary union to tell us how we should run our tax-and-spend policies. Countries with lower debt burdens in relation to gross domestic product should be allowed more flexibility over their annual deficits than countries such as Belgium, which have unacceptably high debt-to-GDP ratios. I hope that the Government will promote flexibility that takes account, at the point of departure, of where people started from.

There is flexibility on timing within the convergence criteria. We have always said that it is more important to get monetary union right than to get it on time. If it is not possible to meet the criteria—at this stage there is no evidence to suggest that it is not possible, but there are some obvious difficulties and concerns—a short delay would be preferable to seriously breaching the criteria or losing the entire project.

We Liberal Democrats will be working with our political allies in the other member states in the European Union to achieve a framework for monetary union that will be credible and viable, and which we could recommend that the United Kingdom should join.

It remains the Liberal Democrat view that Britain should be active in the great projects of Europe, that monetary union is one of the great projects of Europe and that we should still consider the possibility of joining on the ground floor. We should do our utmost to ensure that, whether or not we join on day one, everything that Britain does is designed to ensure the success of monetary union and our ultimate participation.

We welcome the Government's departure from a confrontational approach that has so long damaged Britain's interests. It is time to try a constructive approach. We are certain that that is entirely compatible with developing and protecting this nation's legitimate sovereign interests.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Before I call the next speaker, may I say that a large number of hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. They are much more likely to be successful if other hon. Members will make their contributions reasonably short.

6.10 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I shall be as brief as possible, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The meeting at the end of this week in Amsterdam was called mainly to approve the text of the draft treaty that has come to be known as Maastricht 2—the intergovernmental

conference treaty. The Heads of Government have some unfinished business arising from Maastricht 1 and the stability pact. They must also approve in particular a draft instrument giving legal authority to the so-called stability pact—a somewhat bizarre and Orwellian description, if I may say so. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) may have preferred to call it a sustainability pact, but to describe it as a growth and stability pact in Europe in the present circumstances is bizarre.

With regard to Maastricht 2, I approve and applaud the stance taken by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Government, in particular—this was not mentioned today, although it is set out clearly in our manifesto—the determination to maintain a veto over defence and to ensure that defence remains within NATO, the determination to maintain a veto in effect over foreign policy, and the determination to maintain the right of the United Kingdom Government to decide on immigration matters and, as the Prime Minister has said, to protect our borders. There will be no qualified majority on those issues.

By asserting those rights and powers, the Government are asserting the primacy of the nation state in those matters. They are making it clear that the governance—an inelegant but sometimes rather useful word—of defence, foreign policy, borders and immigration is to be left in the hands of a democratically elected Government and Parliament. To some people, it is an assertion of that somewhat old-fashioned and much-derided concept of sovereignty. When we defend those aspects, as I am sure my right hon. Friends do vigorously, we are defending the old-fashioned concept of sovereignty.

That is in stark contrast to what the Government are expected to do in regard to the single currency—that is, to sign the draft instrument that authorises and establishes the stability pact. I do not criticise the Government for that, as I shall make clear. The House well knows that the stability pact is required so that we can, in effect, enshrine into the treaty the 3 per cent. limit on Government borrowing, which is contained in the Maastricht treaty and is an entry requirement.

Subject to the exceptions, if a country breaches the 3 per cent. limit, there is a power under the stability pact to impose fines on that country from the centre. As I understand it from the documents, those fines will be scattered around and distributed among the good boys of the members of the single currency. That is clearly an incentive for the others to fine the recalcitrant member. As I am told and as I read in the newspapers, a deficit will have to be well below 3 per cent. normally to ensure that a Government do not transgress. In future, deficits will have to be 1 or 2 per cent. at the most.

The stability pact, together with the 3 per cent. entry requirement, the 60 per cent. debt question and the transfer of monetary policy and the control of inflation to the European central bank, are all to be enshrined and entrenched in a treaty, which can be changed only with the consent of all the members of the European Union. That means that, to a substantial extent, the economic governance of Britain and of all the states of the EU will no longer be democratically based.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary mentioned our sister parties in Europe and the values of democracy that we in the Labour party share with them. In the governance of economic matters, most of the powers of the various Governments of Europe will be placed with unelected, undemocratic institutions operating beyond the frontiers of the state and beyond the borders of Britain or any of the other countries. That is what will happen if we join the single currency.

The hon. Member for Gordon spoke about taxation. In theory, taxation will remain in the hands of the nation state, but buried in the papers before us is a request for the Heads of Government to consider signing common guidelines on taxation. I have obtained those guidelines, which are contained in a resolution made on 13 May 1997 by the European Parliament. They are set out clearly, with the aid of the Commission.

The guidelines end by stating, in one of those marvellous phrases that we get from Europe, that taxation is an example of the excess of subsidiarity, which is therefore to be whittled away. The nation state has and will still have an excess of subsidiarity, at least in theory, once we have enshrined everything else in the Maastricht treaty.

There are those who believe, or who pretend to believe, that the decision to join a single currency is merely a matter of economics—just a matter for the counting house. We have heard that again today. A single currency, apparently, is nothing more than an addendum to the single market. That may be the view of the European elite, but the peoples of the old nation states of Europe know differently. They know that the issues go to the heart of democratic government and economic governance.

The fact that the European elite are determined to take economic government out of the hands of elected Governments and entrench it in a treaty shows how out of touch they have become. They want to do that at a time when one of the real problems in Europe is the alienation of people from politics and the political classes. At such a time, the European elite in France and Germany want to take democratic power out of the people's hands. They want to do that at a time when Europe faces terrible problems.

In the next few years, France and Germany will have to adapt—as Britain has—to global competition. They will have to re-examine their social security systems and their labour markets, which will create considerable upheaval. France and Germany will need to apply every scintilla of democracy at their disposal if they are to solve those problems. At the same time, the European political classes want to eliminate democracy. There will be no safety valve. Democracy will not be allowed to solve the problems: they will be resolved by banks, treaties and the convergence criteria.

I do not expect my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State not to sign the legal instrument at Amsterdam. It has been agreed and it will be signed. Ironically, perhaps he will watch Mr. Jospin out of the corner of one eye to see what he is doing. Mr. Jospin told the French electorate that he does not like the stability pact because it is not flexible enough. However, I guarantee that Mr. Jospin will sign the stability pact because he is a paid-up member of the French political elite. That elite body will not give up merely because the people have decided something different in an election. It takes more than that to make the French political elite change their grand historical designs.

Perhaps my right hon. Friend will look at poor Chancellor Kohl out of the corner of his other eye. Chancellor Kohl is a decent and a good man, but he will

[Mr. Denzil Davies]

sign anything. He will certainly sign the stability pact. He still feels the lash of the Bundesbank on his back. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) attempted to criticise the German bank for revaluing its gold. The bank and the German Government were entitled to do that if gold was low on the balance sheet. I am no accountant, but I found it strange that the bank had to pay a dividend from that revaluation—when it had no cash to do so—to the German Government within one year to enable them to reduce their borrowing and deficit below 3 per cent. That is the real problem.

Chancellor Kohl is caught in a vice, and he will sign anything—despite the fact that the German people are overwhelmingly hostile to the idea of giving up a currency that has secured stability and security for Germany for almost 50 years and swapping it for a currency that has never been tried or traded and over which they will have little control. Kohl, Chirac and Jospin will sign the stability pact because they are locked into the project and they cannot go back.

Mr. Cash: I do not wish to embarrass the right hon. Gentleman, but does he realise that this debate is about removing the scrutiny reserve that was imposed last December by the Select Committee on European Legislation? The effect would be to release the Government to sign the stability pact.

Mr. Davies: Those matters have been debated already. The reality is that the Government will sign the instrument for the stability pact in Amsterdam at the weekend. I am trying to explain the potential consequences of that action.

We like to use the phrase, "Think the unthinkable." Perhaps the time has come to think the unthinkable about the single currency project. We cannot expect the French and German political establishments to think the unthinkable: they are incapable of any rational thought when it comes to the single currency. Who knows? Perhaps funny old Britain, with its centuries of global experience, should start thinking the unthinkable. We talk about the global economy and the global market, but no European country has the historical global experience of Britain.

Britain has an intuitive feeling for finance and commerce. The Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Gordon, said that the central bank should be based in London—for a moment I thought that he was a little Englander. Britain's financial intuition has not always coincided with financial thinking on the continent—and we have often been proved more correct on such matters. Britain also has a healthy distrust for corporatism and for all the undemocratic institutions that follow it. Perhaps funny old Britain should start thinking the unthinkable—and perhaps the Foreign Secretary should begin that thought process on the ministerial aeroplane as he returns from Amsterdam.

6.25 pm

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) in the debate. I hope that I do not cause him undue embarrassment when I say that I found his views on Europe distinctly more realistic than those expressed by the Foreign Secretary in opening the debate.

Conservative Members have expressed two alternative views as to the merits or otherwise of surrendering our opt-out from the social chapter. I addressed that subject in some detail in my speech on the Loyal Address, so I shall not repeat those points now. However, it is instructive to consider what has occurred in the intervening three weeks.

The Social Affairs Commissioner, Mr. Flynn, has proposed that the threshold for the works council directive—which is currently set at 1,000 employees—should be reduced to 50 employees. That would bring within the ambit of the existing works council directive virtually every business in this country. Mr. Flynn has also proposed imposing additional, legally binding requirements on companies, forcing them to consult before anyone is made redundant. Only last week, agreement was reached with continental trade unions regarding a whole raft of new contractual rights for those in part-time and temporary employment. That is the main subject of one of the next directives to be produced under the social chapter: the so-called atypical work directive. I believe that it will have some very real implications for labour market flexibility in those areas.

I think that the key issue is not the desirability or otherwise of those rights. We can debate the issues on the Floor of the House and consider whether those rights affect employers' willingness to hire people, and thereby impact directly on jobs. The central issue is whether legislation in this key area will remain at Westminster under our national control, or whether the legislative initiative will be surrendered to Europe. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) said that, although he has reservations about giving extra power to the Bank of England, at least that power derives from domestic legislation that may be revoked if the Government decide that it is wrong.

The same is true of the social chapter. If the Labour party wishes to use its huge parliamentary majority to introduce more rights for British workers that compare with those of workers on the continent, it has the means to do so nationally. That does not require the surrender of our opt-out from the social chapter. I was struck by the comments of the Prime Minister on his first foray into Europe when he attended the meeting at Noordwijk. The Reuters extract of his remarks about the social chapter states:

"Mr. Blair . . . declared . . . that the Social Chapter . . . must not be used in order to introduce new legislation that could affect competitiveness and which could end up placing additional burdens on employment."

The Prime Minister seemed to regret the surrender of the opt-out from the social chapter before he had made the concession. If the Government are really concerned not to affect the competitiveness of our country or place additional burdens on employment, the last thing that they should do is surrender our opt-out from the social chapter, which, as has already been pointed out, is largely subject to qualified majority voting, not unanimity. We are surrendering not only our opt-out, but our veto. It is probably too late to change, but I believe that that is a thoroughly bad policy for which Britain will pay in jobs. If the Government do a U-turn and abandon that policy at Amsterdam, they will be lauded by the Conservatives.

I should like to refer to some very important aspects of the new treaty. The first is the extension of qualified majority voting. As I said during the debate on the Loyal

Address, the Commission has always had a major extension of QMV on its agenda for the intergovernmental conference. It published a paper in February proposing that 18 new areas of policy should be subject to QMV. It is of great concern to all Conservatives that that agenda seems to have remained largely intact. In addition, the paper proposes four new treaty competencies to be subject to QMV rather than unanimity, covering some wide areas of policy.

I agree with the comments of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition about the move away from unanimity. I accept that the Conservative Government made some moves on that, but the key argument is about where power lies. Further moves towards qualified majority voting would be irreversible. It is almost inconceivable that there would be a subsequent treaty amendment to reverse the process and return those powers. The Government are contemplating ending for all time our ability to say no to legislative proposals in wide areas of policy. I earnestly hope that in Amsterdam the Government will not surrender our existing rights of veto in key areas, including the environment and industrial policy. The long-term consequences for this country of moving to QMV on those and many other policy areas would be damaging.

I am sorry that the Foreign Secretary did not refer to subsidiarity, on which the British Government secured an important concession at Maastricht. It is vital that that concession is made more secure at Amsterdam. In particular, it must be made justiciable. When the Commission takes powers to itself or initiates legislation that could perfectly well be dealt with by national Governments, individual member states must be able to argue to the European Court of Justice that the Commission has exceeded its powers and gain a judgment that would take those powers back to member states.

The previous Conservative Government tabled proposals to that effect. It is of concern that those proposals have been severely watered down in the draft protocol on subsidiarity. The protocol is inadequate. I hope that the Minister will give us a clear assurance that he will reject the draft treaty's proposals on subsidiarity and will go back to those tabled by the previous Conservative Government.

I do not take the view that everything about the European Court of Justice is bad—indeed, quite the contrary. It is an important protection for this country. We have a good record of operating European Union legislation rigorously and fairly—a record which is not shared by all our European partners. If we are to have the ability to ensure that EU legislation is enforced fairly and rigorously throughout the EU, we must be able to go to the European Court if we believe that others have cheated at the expense of this country.

The European Court of Justice has one significant defect. Like other supreme courts in parliamentary democracies, its judgments have the immediate effect of law. However, unlike any other supreme court in the parliamentary democracies of Europe or north America, its judgments are impossible to modify. A judgment that is out of line with what the Council of Ministers wants cannot be modified unless a treaty amendment is passed unanimously—treaty amendments require unanimity—at an intergovernmental conference.

The previous Conservative Government did some important work on that, publishing proposals for changes and coming forward with a new procedure to enable the Council of Ministers to meet after a European Court judgment and produce a treaty amendment rapidly by qualified majority voting, to bring the legislation back into line with the majority view. Sadly, the treaty before us today makes no reference to those proposals. I hope that the Minister will assure us that the new British Government will adhere to those proposals, because they are essential to continued confidence in the operation of the European Court of Justice. We cannot have a supreme court with a law-making capacity whose decisions are impossible to modify.

The Foreign Secretary also scarcely mentioned the European Parliament. No doubt there are different views in the House on how much further the powers of the European Parliament should be extended, but I hope that we can agree on a common starting point: that the provisions in the draft treaty are the biggest single extension of the powers of the European Parliament since the creation of the European Economic Community. I believe that that is a fair statement of fact. It has long been on the agenda of those who want to move towards a federal Europe to bring about significant transfers of legislative powers from national Parliaments to the European Parliament. We are well aware, from our experience of dealing with European legislation, of how negligible our power is in this House.

The new treaty is beginning to follow the same process in relation to the Council of Ministers. As I hope all hon. Members understand, reducing or even emasculating the powers of the Council of Ministers is another indirect way in which to emasculate the powers of national Parliaments to which national Ministers are accountable.

Mr. Radice *indicated dissent.*

Sir John Stanley: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head in disagreement. I simply point, therefore, to the relevant section of the treaty text. I invite any and every hon. Member who has not read it already to look at pages 111 and 113, where there is a complete list of areas that, for the first time, will become subject to the co-decision process. The co-decision process is the critical process of expanding the authority and powers of the European Parliament at the expense of the Council of Ministers. A total of 23 separate areas of policy are, for the first time, to be made subject to the co-decision process. They include employment, social policy, transport, the internal market and structural funds.

The previous Conservative Government were entirely right to say that if Europe was to continue to be a partnership of nation states as opposed to a federal Europe, there was no further case for any material extension of the powers of the European Parliament. In the draft treaty, we most certainly have such an extension. Again, I ask the Minister to make clear to us the new Government's policy in that critical area.

I now come to the most crucial area of all—the boundaries of the competencies of the European Union and its institutions in relation to those of national Parliaments. I put it to the House—I hope, again, that I am speaking purely factually—that the draft treaty proposes extensions of the role of the European Union's institutions in virtually every area of policy and takes us into areas of policy that have not been included before.

[Sir John Stanley]

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition rightly drew attention to the proposal for a new legal persona for the European Union in international affairs, making it capable of being a treaty signatory and giving it, in legal terms, almost the same locus and status as nation states. There are far-reaching proposals to extend the involvement of the European Union in foreign affairs and there are to be new involvements in defence. Immigration, human rights and non-discrimination are being brought in, as are a whole range of domestic policy areas. It is even proposed to extend the role of the European Union in culture, believe it or not. Those are far-reaching extensions of the competencies of the European Union.

We may debate whether the extension of the EU's powers in that way is desirable. I hope, however, that we can end the debate—having heard the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce), I am not sure that we can—on what is the basic thrust or the basic goal of the EU. Let us forget the ridiculous term super-state; that can mean anything to anyone. The choice is simply between a partnership of nations and a federal state. Some hon. Members on both sides felt that we got to the fork in that road at Maastricht. I did not take that view because I believed that at the point of Maastricht, we were still on the road of being a partnership of nation states. Five years on, however, as a result of the way in which the EU has moved and of this draft treaty, I am in no doubt about where we are. This treaty takes Europe—we can debate whether this is right or not—irreversibly into a federal structure.

This is the point where the former Labour Opposition's rhetoric and the reality collide. I listened with great care to what the present Prime Minister said during the election and to what was said in the Labour party's manifesto. Labour made it clear that it was opposed to Britain being taken into a federal Europe. The point I put to Ministers in the last few days before they go to Amsterdam is that if they really mean what they say—that they are opposed to Britain becoming part of a federal Europe—they have only one policy option in Amsterdam next week, which is to say no to this treaty.

6.45 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): The last part of the speech by the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) was very exaggerated. I have also read the draft treaty and I have not found in it what he has described. We may or may not want a federal Europe—I personally do not—but a proposal for a federal Europe is not contained in the draft treaty. Inflated language and gross exaggeration do not help the House's perusal of the matter.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on his speech; it was very positive and extremely encouraging. The speech by the Leader of the Opposition was in two parts. There was the bit in which he was still trying to lead his party when he talked about the policy of surrender, which we would apparently come forward with at the Amsterdam summit. He grossly exaggerated, as did the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling, the issue of qualified majority voting and what is involved at Amsterdam. On the other hand, he also spoke as a former Prime Minister about Britain being at the very heart of Europe, which I always find an attractive idea.

The problem for the former Prime Minister was that he was let down by hon. Members of his own party; I can see some of them here. I do not say that they did not act for highly principled reasons, but I believe that they certainly let him down. We have a new situation in this Parliament because the Labour Government are in the enviable position of having the overwhelming support of Parliament for their positive approach to Europe. In the previous Parliament, the Euro-sceptic faction had an influence out of all proportion to its numerical strength because of the previous Government's small majority and because of their weakness. In the end, that was what brought down that Government.

This Government, however, have the support of their vast majority—a majority elected on a positive European manifesto. Unlike the Conservative party, we did not all write different manifestos; one or two of us may have done, but very few did. In addition, our vast majority is buttressed by almost 50 pro-European Liberal Democrat Members and by the pro-European group in the Tory party. That group is bigger than was expected at the time of the election.

Partly because of the landslide, the proportion of pro-European Conservatives who remain is quite large. I can understand why, for tactical reasons, they may not want to put their heads above the parapet in this debate. We hope to hear from them later, depending on what happens in the coming election for the leadership of the Conservative party.

The big advantage for this Government is that, in pursuing their new, more constructive approach, they know that they do not have to look over their shoulder all the time. I think that the Government have made an excellent start. We had immediate visits to our partners by the Foreign Secretary. We had the signal that we intended to sign up to the social chapter which was a symbol of our new approach.

Frankly, that is the way to begin. We cannot start by bargaining; if we believe in something, we have to signal that we are prepared to do it. We have also signalled our support for a new employment chapter and that will show that we intend to be a positive member of the European Union.

For me, what is so refreshing about the Government is that they have abandoned the language of hyperbole and hysteria—we heard a bit of that just now and no doubt we shall hear more from Opposition Members—and have started to present the problems as they really are.

We can now see that the intergovernmental conference is not about the battle of Britain or the end of the nation state as we know it, as we heard so often from Conservative Members, but is a sober discussion of practical issues that are important for Britain and Europe. For example, as Mrs. Thatcher well understood, in certain matters it makes sense for Britain and the European Union to proceed by majority voting. She understood that in order to create a single market, one country cannot be allowed to impede progress. That is why she agreed to it. When I put that point to the Leader of the Opposition, he accepted it immediately because it was true.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, that also applies to fraud, research and development, and environmental matters where it would be in Britain's

interest not to have a veto but to proceed by majority voting. When we talk about our veto, we sometimes forget that our veto is also somebody else's veto and that other countries can veto British policy. We have to understand that a bit better if we are to have a sensible debate about European affairs.

On the other hand, it is true that there are vital national issues such as taxation, foreign policy and, above all, defence. We certainly need a veto when it comes to sending our young men to die, and it is essential to preserve that veto. It is a matter of balance and it has to be considered soberly, carefully and from a pragmatic point of view without the hysteria that we have experienced in the past.

Of course, there are tricky problems to be faced at Amsterdam, including the weighting of voting to achieve a balance between small and large countries. I am sure that a solution will be found, but it is clearly a difficult matter between the states.

Border controls and immigration present problems, but, in my view, the other countries respect the fact that, for the moment, the United Kingdom—and, necessarily, Ireland—occupies a special position.

There is also the relationship between the Western European Union and the European Union to consider. Again, I believe that an acceptable compromise will be reached.

An acceptable agreement that is good for Britain and for Europe can be reached at Amsterdam because we do not have deep divisions between the countries that cannot be overcome. All member states, including the United Kingdom at last, want to reach agreement at Amsterdam. If, by some mischance, the Conservatives had won the election, such an agreement would have included the Conservative Government, for all their propaganda before the election.

We are likely to reach agreement at Amsterdam or soon after, and that will be in Britain's interests. That will be good for the country because it will help us to win over British public opinion after all these years of Euro-sceptic propaganda in the newspapers. It will show that a more co-operative and constructive attitude by the British pays dividends for British national interests as well as for European interests. That is extremely important.

With our presidency approaching at the beginning of 1998, it is important that Britain seizes the initiative. I agree with right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), the Father of the House, that it is not a matter of setting the agenda in the sense of ignoring other countries' interests, but it is important that we try to influence it. That is perfectly acceptable for a major European country such as Britain.

We are right to say that we need to complete the single market, because that is very much in Britain's interests. We are right to talk about the reform of the common agricultural policy. I do not share the view that it is the most perfect instrument devised by men or women. It certainly needs reforming.

We are also right to talk about enlargement. It is important that the former Soviet countries, particularly those on the borders of the European Union, have a real opportunity to join the European Union. We cannot keep them out if they want to join and if they are prepared to accept the rules, as I believe they are. Of course, there will be a transition period, but it is an important objective that we should set for the European Union and I am glad that the Government are in favour of it.

The previous Government were so weak and divided—particularly after the first Danish referendum and the Maastricht vote—that they could only react negatively to proposals by other European countries. We heard echoes of that in the speech by the Leader of the Opposition. It is important that we make positive proposals and I welcome especially the Chancellor's proposal on employment which he is tabling today, or has tabled, at the ECOFIN meeting.

The history of the EU shows that countries that take a positive position are far more likely to get their way. If hon. Members doubt that, they should consider the example of Mrs. Thatcher. She believed that it was important to complete the single market. Her Government took a positive position on that issue and, as a result, we were able to get our way with the support of other countries. We had to make compromises on other issues, but that is the way in which the European Union should proceed. We need a positive agenda of our own.

Finally, let me say a word about the single currency. I shall not indulge in debate with my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies). We do that often enough and I am certain that we shall do so again. Clearly, events in France and Germany have raised questions about the timetable and the way in which monetary union is being established.

It would be easy for us to indulge in a characteristic bout of schadenfreude. I often think that that German word was invented especially for the British, as we spend most of our time indulging in it. We would be foolish indeed, because it is not in our interests for there to be instability of any kind in Europe, particularly monetary instability.

We are certainly entitled to insist on effective criteria because it is in our interests to have economic and monetary union that actually works, but, at the moment, we should be sympathetic and perhaps not say too much. If other countries want to go ahead, we should not try to stop it.

I disagree strongly with the Leader of the Opposition who was entirely wrong when he said that we should vote against monetary union at Amsterdam. That would be a stupid thing to do. If he were Prime Minister now, he would not be advocating it. It is much easier to say that as Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Duncan Smith: He cannot vote against it.

Mr. Radice: Exactly. That is why I was surprised to hear the right hon. Gentleman say it.

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): He did not say it.

Mr. Radice: I thought that he did. I thought that he said that monetary union should be raised at Amsterdam

[Mr. Radice]

and that it was the most important issue to be considered there. Is the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) saying that he wrote the speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Only one hon. Member can address the House at a time.

Mr. Radice: Regardless of whatever the former Prime Minister said exactly and whenever he wanted Britain to vote against a single currency, he said that he believed that Britain should vote against a single currency.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I think that, in fact, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said that the matter should be raised, but that, when others qualify, Britain should vote under qualified majority against their joining if the criteria are fudged.

Mr. Radice: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that clarification, although it still means that there is an intention to vote against the project, which makes my essential point.

We should keep open the option of Britain joining a single currency—after a referendum, of course—if we believe it to be in our interests. Contrary to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli believes, I believe, as he knows, that there are strong arguments for a single currency. I also believe that it would be greatly disadvantageous for us to stay out of a single currency if one went ahead. On that point, I agree with the Leader of the Opposition, who is absolutely right to believe that.

I congratulate the Government on their excellent start. I wish them every success and luck in Amsterdam and urge them to keep up the good work.

7 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): The debate has been like many previous debates on Europe—notable for the Euro-sceptical speeches of Government Members. That is an interesting feature, which is already developing under the new Government.

I congratulate the Government on the creation of a new atmosphere between the United Kingdom and other members of the European Union—although I know that some Opposition Members may criticise that. The Government have got off on the right foot in relations between the continent and the UK.

I was, therefore, interested to note that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said that one of the problems in the House was our lack of knowledge of European institutions. He accused most hon. Members of not knowing how many EU institutions there were and, even if they knew how many there were, of not knowing where they met. I think that the problem is deeper than that.

I do not dismiss hon. Members' knowledge of the EU. In fact, I think that they are very well informed. Some hon. Members present served with me in the European Parliament between 1979 and 1989. Some of the best-informed members of European institutions were those from the UK—both Labour and Conservative. They made more contributions to the work of the European Parliament than many other Members from other nations. Yet—I say this as an Ulsterman and I think that the Welsh and the Scots would probably confirm it—there was a problem with the attitude of continental Members of the European Parliament towards English MEPs. Labour MEPs were always disliked in Strasbourg. That is hard to say, but it is true.

Mrs. Clwyd *indicated assent.*

Mr. Taylor: I see one former Labour MEP nodding in agreement. Worse still, Conservative MEPs were despised.

Mrs. Clwyd: Hear, hear.

Mr. Taylor: Yes, they were. The Ulstermen, the Scots and the Welsh were always liked. As you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will understand from your background, there is a cultural problem in relations between the United Kingdom and the continent of Europe, which we must understand. That is why I praise the Government for the steps that they have taken in the past few weeks to try to improve relations between this Parliament and EU institutions.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield also criticised his right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and said that democracy was not at risk. I come down on the side of the right hon. Gentleman when we discuss issues such as the single currency.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The right hon. Gentleman said that the relationship is warmer and better, and congratulated the Government on achieving that already. I remind him that, in 1991, he was probably tempted to say almost exactly the same thing about the then new Prime Minister and his relationship with Europe. The five subsequent years demonstrated that the special cultural differences and changes made such a position almost impossible.

Mr. Taylor: Originally, I was going to make that comment, but I decided to remove it from my speech. Time will tell. I want simply to place on the record the fact that, at this stage, one month since the Government took office, they have started off on the right foot in relations between the UK and the EU.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is, for example, rightly saying at ECOFIN that the most important issue is the provision of more jobs in the United Kingdom and across Europe. When I first entered the European Parliament, only 12 million people were unemployed. Yet 20 years later, the figure is 50 per cent. higher. That is the "success" of European policy: a total failure—driving more and more people out of jobs. The Chancellor says that he has five means of recommending how we bring about the provision of new jobs in the EU, but we have not yet seen the detail of those five programmes. We do not know what they really are or how they will be funded.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield is criticised for saying that democracy is at risk, but, of course, it is at risk. A central bank in Frankfurt will control interest rates and a discipline will be applied to all member nations. We will, of course, be left the right to raise taxes, as has been said, but our total public expenditure will be restricted.

That will mean that the people of the United Kingdom will no longer be able to set financial policy in this country through the UK's democratic system. They will be controlled from outside.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield was right in his definition of democracy. The people have a right to make a decision and, if they do not like that decision, they have a right to reverse it later. If we set up a European bank and a single currency, however, decisions will be made in Frankfurt which the people of the United Kingdom, regardless of whether they vote Labour, Conservative or even Ulster Unionist, will not have the right to change.

Mr. Cash: Has the right hon. Gentleman not noticed a slight contradiction in his argument? He is developing it very well in relation to the difficulties that arise from the various provisions of the treaties, such as unemployment, but does not he recognise that the troubles in France, Germany and all other countries come from the clamp of the Maastricht criteria? That is precisely why those of us who took such exception to the arrangements for the single currency agree with him on the one hand, but, on the other, disagree with him when he does not draw the right conclusions.

Mr. Taylor: I have no doubt that the criteria imposed by the Maastricht treaty have created the conditions that apply in Germany, which has massive unemployment of almost 5 million people. They have also caused the situation in France, which led to a change of Government. That is why I say that I applaud what the Chancellor of the Exchequer is trying to do.

Mr. Cash: But he cannot do it.

Mr. Taylor: Exactly. I want to hear the detail of how such provisions will be financed because I believe that there is a contradiction in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's policies. We must wait for those details to emerge.

The Ulster Unionists support the enlargement of the European Union. The Council of Europe already has many members with a common approach to human rights, individual rights and cultural activities. The Council debates foreign policy, creating a common theme throughout a wider number of nations than are members of the European Union. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned that, as we extend the European Union, we wish to welcome as quickly as possible countries such as Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic.

However, I differed with the right hon. Gentleman when he mentioned the small island of Cyprus. Much as I should like to see Cyprus become a member of the European Union, the last thing we want to do is to bring Cyprus into the EU before it has settled its internal affairs. We do not want to inherit the problems of Cyprus, because we have enough already.

The Foreign Secretary made an excellent speech in opening the debate. It was a skilful speech and I welcomed its underlying tone. The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) may laugh, but when he reads the speech he will find that the underlying tone was somewhat sceptical. That scepticism may emerge in greater detail in the months ahead. The Government have stressed the importance of Europe to the people and I shall finish with two points that affect people's lives, on which I would like some replies from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury this evening.

The first issue is the continuing ban on British beef exports to the European Union. The certified herd scheme has been before the Commission for several months. Some of us met Commissioner Fischler some three months ago in Brussels, following the submission of the scheme. He said that it was a good scheme and that Northern Ireland complied with most of the terms of the Florence agreement.

I welcomed the previous Government's submission of the certified herd scheme. I have a copy of the letter from the then Minister that accompanied the submission; one paragraph was devoted entirely to the problems of Northern Ireland. Since then, Commissioner Fischler has said that Northern Ireland complies in all respects with the European Union's requirements. I wish to know what progress the Government have made since then in regaining access for Northern Ireland's beef to the export market in the European Union.

The second issue is one on which the Conservative Government laid great stress, but I am sorry to say that the Labour Government seem not to have taken it as seriously—quota hopping and the damage that it is doing to the fishing industry. That problem has not yet been mentioned in the debate, which surprises me. The Laessen report recommended a further 40 per cent. reduction in the British fishing fleet—I should say, the United Kingdom fishing fleet, because the terms are sometimes misunderstood. Such a reduction would be disastrous for the fishing industry in Northern Ireland, especially because of the impact of quota hopping on the United Kingdom fishing industry.

For example, 46 per cent. of the United Kingdom quota for hake and 44 per cent. of our quota for plaice is already taken up by foreign quota hoppers. In other words, almost half of those two stocks are taken up by non-UK vessels. That is a serious problem which the Government must address.

I heard on the radio over the weekend that the Government hope to resolve the matter in the next 10 days. I should like a progress report this evening that would be good news for the fishing industry throughout the United Kingdom.

7.13 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Some of the speeches in this debate have looked back over the past 22 years. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) mentioned the fact that he had changed his attitude since the referendum in 1975. I confess to the House that I have changed my attitude, too, and I had very good reasons for doing so. In 1975, it was just conceivable, because of the nature of our manufacturing base, that Britain could operate outside the then European Community. Since then, during the Thatcher-Lawson years, our manufacturing base has been decimated.

Two other factors have arisen. Europe has changed. When we talk about the European Union, we no longer mean only six countries, but many more. The traditions of those additional countries often have much in common with the British Labour movement, and Sweden is one example. A social dimension has also been introduced.

[Mr. Robert N. Wareing]

Many of us argued in 1975 that we were being asked to become part of a bankers' Europe. Nobody can argue that now, because—since Jacques Delors and the social chapter—the European Union has undoubtedly acquired a social dimension and one that has been accepted by the Labour Government.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) mentioned the dangers to democracy that he sees. I remind the House that democracy is not as age-old in this country as we would like to think. It is true that we have had parliamentary government for nearly 1,000 years, but it is only 165 years since the first Reform Bill was passed. All that did was give one man in 40 the right to vote. It is only in this century that working men have all had the vote on an equal basis, and women have had that right only since the 1929 election. As recently as 1945, most women did not have the right to vote in local elections because of the householder franchise. In 1948, the university seats and the business vote were abolished. We should not talk as if we have been a democracy for centuries, because we have not.

If there is a democratic deficit in Europe, the answer is not to ignore Europe but to make up the deficit. I do not share the fears that have been expressed by some hon. Members today that the European Parliament will usurp Westminster's powers. However, it is right that the European Parliament, meeting as it does in public, should be able to control the executive machinery of the European Union which meets in camera.

A breath of fresh air is blowing through our continent today. It was generated by the decisive decision of the British people on 1 May to reject a party whose leadership refused to disavow the bigots and the extreme chauvinists in its ranks. New Members are lucky indeed because they do not have to listen to the bigotry and the racialism that oozed from the mouths of David Evans and Tony Marlow. The British people turned their backs on such candidates, including the Tory candidate in Edgbaston who attacked the Labour candidate—now, I am glad to say, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart)—because of her Germanic roots. The Tory Government whipped up hatred against Europeans in general, and Germans in particular.

We remember the writings of Nicholas Ridley, and some of the speeches of Lord Tebbit. We remember also that one of the Conservative party's leadership contenders embarked on such a tirade. During this Parliament, no Minister will be heard at his party conference making fun of foreigners, as the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) once did. Those days have gone. Although there may be differences among Labour Members, these are based on politics and economics and are not borne out of racism and bigotry.

The Tory Euro-sceptics talked about protecting British sovereignty, and the interests of the people. We believe the most important people to be working people, and that is why the Government have taken early action to fulfil our manifesto commitment to sign up to the social chapter and to recognise that British workers—whether full time or part time—should not be treated as second-class European citizens.

Likewise, the Government are right to put the scourge of unemployment at the top of their European agenda. The convergence criteria for the single currency cannot be properly attainable with a background of 80 million unemployed people in the EU. As the people of France have come to understand, attempting to reach the target of 3 per cent. of GDP borrowing requirement by slashing jobs and welfare is not the way to endear the concept of European unity to the mass of people. In rejecting the Gaullists, the French people decided that there had to be a better way.

I believe that if there is a single currency, we should enter it as and when we are in a position to attain the 3 per cent. target, backed by fuller employment. When those who are now unemployed become employed, they will no longer be a financial burden on the state and will pay taxes. That will help to sustain the 3 per cent. limit without damaging the social infrastructure.

I do not believe for one minute that, if the rest of Europe—certainly the core countries of the EU—accepts a single currency, it will be possible for Britain to remain aloof. For Britain to persist with the pound sterling while Germany, France, Italy and perhaps others operate a single currency would invite speculators on a large scale and would make business highly costly for the British business man, compared with his European counterparts. If Britain is to compete on an equal footing with our counterparts in the rest of Europe, there has to be acceptance sooner or later of Britain's entry to a single currency.

One aspect that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did not mention today is human rights, but he should be congratulated on putting that at the top of his foreign policy agenda. When we talk about human rights and foreign policy, we tend to think of countries such as Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and—perhaps—Turkey, and a good reason why Turkey's application to join the EU should not be considered is that country's human rights record. There are other human rights problems within the boundaries of Europe and I wish to express some caution about the enlargement of the EU.

I fully support Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary being accepted into the EU as early as possible. In many respects, Hungary could fit in neatly tomorrow morning. Unlike the right hon. Member for Strangford, I would not allow Turkey a veto over Cyprus's application. However, we should be careful about the applications that will come from the Baltic states. This is a cautionary note that I would like to add to the debate. In Latvia, 46 per cent. of the population are Russian. Of the 1.5 million people who live in Estonia, one third are Russian. These people are being denied their human rights. Many of them have lived there for 50 years or more, but one third of the population are unlikely ever to be other than non-citizens because they—the Russian speakers—are unlikely ever to meet the linguistic requirements for Estonian citizenship.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary undoubtedly will have difficult decisions to make in Amsterdam, but the manner in which he, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have embarked on the European journey with the Labour Government is in stark contrast to the way in which the former Prime Minister led the Conservative Government. He said that he was ready to be at the heart of Europe, but his Back Benchers were at his heart and he lost heart. Because of that, he lost the election. I wish my right hon. Friends good luck in Amsterdam, and I feel sure that they will act on behalf of

all the British people and that the decisions to which they come will be true to the Labour party's internationalist traditions.

7.26 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): It has been intriguing listening to the schizophrenic socialist party's windmills of the mind, because there are only a few days to go before the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary go to Amsterdam. It is clear from today's speeches that they do not understand what the treaty says. There is a famous analogy; they have not read the Amsterdam treaty as one of our distinguished leadership candidates is reputed not to have read the Maastricht treaty.

The problem goes back to the Prime Minister's statement, as Leader of the Opposition, on 5 April 1995, when he made the most monumental misjudgment about the future of Europe. In a speech at Chatham House, he said that the other member states were not making strides towards a federal Europe. As I understand it from some diplomatic notes that have been leaked to me, in return for the resolution of the quota hopping issue he will give a series of concessions on the Amsterdam treaty, completely ignoring the federal character of what is being created—a federal character clearly described by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) in an excellent speech. My right hon. Friend was, of course, criticised by Opposition Members as usual—I do not hold that against them. On balance, I agree that a deep, federal shift will take place in Amsterdam, although I depart a little from my right hon. Friend's judgment that the Maastricht treaty did not have the same effect.

In a nutshell, the real distinction between the Single European Act, which I always supported although I would like reforms to get rid of unfair subsidies, and the Maastricht treaty is that under the former there was a reaffirmation of the principle of majority voting that was already there for agriculture, industry and various other things. As I have said before, the critical point is that the Maastricht treaty was about European government whereas the Single European Act was about political co-operation and trading relationships. There is a world of difference between the two.

On the Amsterdam treaty, the idea that the European Union should be given a legal personality is a massive step in the direction of a federal Europe. It is pointless continuing to recite the mantra that we are not, to all intents and purposes, in a federal arrangement. I am more interested in identifying the functions that are being transferred as the constitutional criteria for determining the movement towards European government than in the general expression, federal or otherwise. The functions that are transferred will determine whether we reduce our democratic control over the Government of this country through this House and the accountability of that Government to the House.

I take grave exception to the legal personality and enhanced powers of the European Court of Justice, particularly the extension of its powers to cover criminal law, which we have been assured over and over again could not and would not happen. Furthermore, the chapter regarding fundamental rights and freedoms contains the most horrendous provisions which, if approved, would give the court the power to adjudicate on alleged breaches of fundamental rights that will be entrenched in our legislation through the Maastricht treaty. Any breach of those rights will be visited with sanctions against the member states in question. The House has not had much of an opportunity to consider all these questions. In the time available today, hon. Members cannot touch on them in the depth that they require.

I strongly criticise the Prime Minister for utterly failing—for the first time, as far as I know since the founding Act was passed—to make a statement to the House after the Noordwijk summit and the Russia-NATO summit. For many reasons that I do not want to recite today, we have made fair accusations against the Government for their failure to treat this House with proper respect. This is yet another example. The Prime Minister's failure to make statements to the House on fundamental European matters is outrageous. The inexperienced Minister who is sitting on the Front Bench for the first time suggested that it is not a contempt of the House for the Prime Minister to refuse to come to the House to tell us about the Noordwijk summit and the Russia-NATO treaty; he is merely demonstrating his junior capacity and his inexperience.

For all the reasons that I have given, I firmly believe that we should veto the treaty in its entirety. Furthermore, unless, as I pointed out in an amendment that stands in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), there is renegotiation of monetary union by placing the single currency on the agenda for the intergovernmental conference, we should veto not merely the treaty but the entire conference. That would be in the interests not merely of the United Kingdom, but of Europe as a whole.

As we heard in the good speech by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) and in my interventions on the Foreign Secretary and the Leader of the Opposition, the stability pact is at the heart of European politics this very day.

As I pointed out, the Government—through the arrangements that they formulated for this debate—are treating the House with contempt for the following reason: only a few months ago, the Select Committee on European Legislation tabled an unprecedented motion, criticising the previous Government. Despite the Committee's insistence, the Government ignored its request that a matter as important as the stability pact should be taken on the Floor of the House. I criticised the previous Prime Minister for that. Indeed, about 150 hon. Members on both sides of the House took the same point of view.

Among all the other papers that we are considering today is that same stability pact. The single currency, which is the most crucial question facing Europe, is buried in lines of verbiage about the various documents that we are supposed to be considering. If the Prime Minister were here, I would challenge him—indeed, I challenge the Ministers on the Front Bench—to tell us why the Government propose to allow the stability pact to go through without the full and proper debate required by the Select Committee on European Legislation. That sort of contempt is not merely a matter of disrespect, it is fundamentally undemocratic. It means that hon. Members are not being given the opportunity to form a proper judgment about what is going on in the name of this country.

[Mr. William Cash]

The stability pact is about the creation of a hard core, which is what the Germans want. It is based on an attempt to ensure that they have their kind of Europe. The Leader of the Opposition called for delay on the single currency—I would call for rejection—because it would lead to a Europe that lacks equilibrium and has a new centre of gravity. As I have argued on many occasions, if we allow the measure to get through it will lead to an increasingly German Europe.

The Germans themselves are now critical of that prospect. I visited Germany recently and met many leading German figures. I had a meeting with Hans Tietmeyer in the Bundesbank not so long ago. From that conversation, I predicted what has now happened. The Bundesbank has taken exception to what the German Government are doing and the most recent figures suggest that as many as 60 per cent. of the German people do not want the single currency on those terms.

Professor Wilhelm Nolling has said that he will take the matter to the constitutional court in Germany, and Professor Wilhelm Hankel of Frankfurt has emphasised that to revalue the gold reserves and cash in a profit—a decision tied up with the ridiculous policy of the single currency and stability pact—is equivalent to printing money.

That is bringing Germany and Chancellor Kohl into disrepute and, as Professor Hankel points out, from the point of view of stability policy, it is as questionable as allowing the monetisation of debt, which the Maastricht treaty forbids for good reason. That is why the matter is being taken so incredibly seriously in Germany. I whole-heartedly endorse and encourage those Germans who are taking a position against their Government, who are putting the obsession with political union ahead of common sense and the interests of stability in Germany, the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe.

Senior German figures, such as Gerhard Schröder and Herbert Hax, Kohl's chief economic adviser, have called for a delay to economic and monetary union. I would much rather renegotiate everything, which Amsterdam provides us with the opportunity to do. Failure to do so will be an act of folly and a dereliction of responsibility, as the previous Prime Minister said.

I made an intervention concerning the stability pact during the speech of the Leader of the Opposition. I strongly criticised the pact and will continue to do so. He said that I was wrong; I stand to be judged on that in due course. I suspect that he supported it because, as I know from a reply that the Prime Minister gave me the other day, it was not only a political agreement, endorsed by the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer and backed up at Dublin by the Leader of the Opposition, but became a final agreement and is now being implemented by the former Opposition.

The pact is in my opinion a fundamental mistake; it creates a hard core and we will be deeply damaged by it regardless of whether we are in or out of monetary union. If the hard core is a weak euro, we will be damaged by the lack of growth; if we are on the outside, it will be better not to have had it at all. That was the basis of my objections to the Maastricht treaty in the first place and it is why I shall certainly abstain on the Opposition motion this evening.

If I was wrong about the exchange rate mechanism in my objections to it as it developed, I am glad to have been wrong. It was a vicious and bad policy, based on our 1992 manifesto, that led us into all sorts of difficulties and contributed massively, in my judgment, to our loss in the general election, because the public sector borrowing requirement went up to £50 billion and we imposed taxes such as value added tax on fuel.

I do not believe that I was precisely wrong, to put it mildly, with respect to the political obsession of Chancellor Kohl in driving for a federal Europe. I criticised the "heart of Europe" speech for good reasons, and would do so again. I am glad to note that the Leader of the Opposition has been good enough candidly to acknowledge that the exchange rate mechanism was a political mistake and to consider again the implications of the "heart of Europe" speech in an interview with Professor Anthony Selden.

The wait-and-see policy was always flawed. It remains flawed in the hands of the new Government. Is it a good idea to have a policy of wait and see as unemployment rockets and growth plummets? Is it good policy to wait and see, with all the uncertainty that that involves?

The Government do not have the guts to consider what is going on—the riots and disorder in France and Germany and the youth unemployment. The Prime Minister goes on about relieving youth unemployment with a so-called five-point plan, when the very policies that arise from the Maastricht treaty have generated youth unemployment of 28 per cent. in France and 33 per cent. in Spain.

Not one thing that I have heard today from the Foreign Secretary, nor all the glitzy presentation from the Prime Minister since the Government came into office, has given me the slightest confidence that they have the faintest idea how to run a European policy. That is why I and my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green tabled amendment (c), which says that we have absolutely no confidence in Her Majesty's Government in relation to European affairs or in their capacity to negotiate.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) spoke about the central bank. He is completely right to say that it is anathema to our democracy. It is ultimately an unaccountable arrangement under which the bank governors are not allowed by law, subject to the European Court of Justice, to seek or take instructions from the member states. If they are not allowed to do that, nobody controls them and they are completely unaccountable.

When things go wrong, there will be a tremendous problem, because, on the one hand, there is the possibility of the breach of law and, on the other, the impossibility of bringing anyone to account. At the very same time, this Parliament and others will be emasculated. There will be no safety valve, and that will be the breeding ground for serious disorder, leading possibly even to a more extreme form of fascism or authoritarianism throughout Europe.

That is avoidable by avoiding the full implications of the treaty. That is the danger that we face, which is why I say that all the single currency arrangements should be renegotiated at Amsterdam. They are the breeding ground for unemployment, cowardice and disorder, which will follow as surely as night follows day.

The NATO pact, which we have not properly examined, is highly dangerous, allowing the Russians far more influence in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation than is justified.

The problem with flexibility is best encapsulated by the disaster of monetary union and the manner in which it was described in the flexibility paper in the appalling Amsterdam treaty. In the notes, the European Commission says that economic and monetary union is the best form of flexibility yet devised.

If monetary union, which has been an unmitigated failure and the centre of so much controversy and despair throughout Europe, is to be regarded as the best form of flexibility, why on earth do not this wretched Government abandon a treaty that has flexibility right at its heart? It is all very well for the Minister with responsibility for Europe, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), to laugh; if he persists in the policy that is being pursued at Amsterdam, the laugh will be on the other side of his face.

7.48 pm

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this important debate.

To use an expression little used nowadays, I come from an ordinary working-class background, where it is not the norm to go into public life, let alone become a Member of Parliament. It is therefore with deep humility, but also with pride—for myself, for my family and for the community of Harlow that nurtured me—that I make my maiden speech.

It is customary to pay tribute to one's predecessors, which I am more than happy to do. Hon. Members new and old will have their memories of my predecessor, Jerry Hayes. I say with some admiration, and certainly with respect, that he was a politician who never shrank from an opportunity to use the media to expose his views to public scrutiny. In the context of this debate on Europe, he came from what I would call the sensible wing of the Conservative party. He rightly understood that Britain had no future outside the European Union, certainly not a prosperous one. I also learnt during the general election campaign that he was a dedicated constituency representative who earned enormous respect for his local work.

I also pay tribute to Stan Newens, who represented Harlow for 15 years. Many hon. Members know that Stan represents London, Central in the European Parliament, but he still lives in Harlow and is remembered with respect and fondness by constituents. Even if one disagrees with Stan, it is impossible not to respect the sincerity and passion of his convictions and the way in which he puts them forward.

Harlow's modern history started with the decision of the Labour Government in 1946 to create a new town there. The decision was popular and welcomed by the majority of local people. It gave rise over the following decades to opportunities for thousands of people where previously there had been none. Families moved, as mine did in the 1960s, from rundown and overcrowded accommodation in London to the green spaces, the lower-density, higher-quality housing, and the excellent comprehensive schools and community facilities offered by Harlow. It was planned and designed as a group of neighbourhood communities separated by pleasant green wedges. The stress on the concept of community and neighbourhood has continued to the present day. Harlow council is a pioneer of successful and pragmatic devolution of power and responsibility to neighbourhood forums and committees.

Harlow has also given rise to magnificent sporting opportunities and facilities. To this day, it boasts the largest youth recreational football league in Europe. Among the products of that excellent system is the current England football coach, Glenn Hoddle, who was a classroom contemporary of mine. I and other Harlow residents will always be happy to be associated with Glenn's achievements, but that is even more true after recent results. I am sure that next summer he and the England team will prove the accuracy of Labour's iron rule of football, that it is only under Labour Governments that England win the World cup. That is the last neo-nationalist comment that I will make in this debate.

Harlow has led the way in innovative social and community facilities: the first all-purpose health centre in 1955; one of the first holiday play schemes in the early 1960s; and one of the earliest after-school care schemes in 1979. I am pleased that the importance of those initiatives is recognised in the new Government's programme. Harlow has lost much of its traditional manufacturing industry. However, that industry is being replaced and Harlow is becoming a centre for scientific research and development. Major international companies such as SmithKline Beecham, Northern Telecom, and Merck, Sharp and Dohme and are centralising their research activities there. Local people welcome that.

I am proud to represent my constituency and I recognise the start in life that Harlow gave me. It is home to a proud working-class community. People support each other and believe in shared community life and facilities. They also aspire to get on in life and to do better for their children. I fully admit that those were the people who my party lost contact with in the 1980s: defence industry workers, council house purchasers and small business people. Labour has come home to them, and they have certainly come home to Labour. I assure hon. Members that we do not intend to lose contact again.

I understand that it is traditional to make a maiden speech on a non-controversial subject. I have therefore chosen Europe. I say that not because I have taken leave of my senses but because I believe that, over time, Europe will and must become a less controversial subject. It is too important to play party politics with. The future of Britain has never been so much at stake as it is now. I say that with particular reference to the Euro-sceptics both inside and outside the Conservative party. They try to reduce every debate to a dogmatic, obsessive tirade against Europe and all things European. They are the King Canutes of British politics. For them, the general election was a watershed. They attempted to play upon ignorance—to use the fact that people do not fully understand how the institutions of Europe work—to create prejudice and fear, and so set Britain apart from Europe. They failed in that enterprise on a massive, unprecedented scale.

I strongly believe in a deepening and growing European Union; a Europe that I am certain will, in time, develop a single currency. Of course, there must be debates and negotiations about start dates, timetables and the convergence criteria, but the idea that Britain could remain outside a single currency for a long time without enormous damage to our economy is fool's gold.

I was interested by the comment of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) that there may be circumstances in the future where it is in Britain's interests to join a single currency. I believe that he was

[Mr. Bill Rammell]

sincere, but I do not believe that he, or any of his potential successors, could deliver the Conservative party to support such a proposition. In a party with pretensions to the national interest, that is to be regretted.

I also believe in a Europe in which, at long last, Britain has signed up to the social chapter so that, at a very basic level, our people can enjoy the same minimum standards of employment as exist elsewhere in Europe. I believe in a Europe where qualified majority voting has been extended to prevent other countries from unacceptably vetoing things that are important to us and our communities. I believe that all those measures are in Britain's interest; certainly they are in the interests of my constituents. Let me give an example of how that is already happening.

Harlow's innovative approach to training and job creation in the past year alone has brought in almost £1 million of European funds. My constituents gain real benefit from the opportunities that constructive partnership in the European Union brings. In essence, that is what the debate is about. To believe in one's country and people does not mean blindly beating the path to isolation. We have to have confidence in our country, its people, its institutions and what they stand for, and to recognise that sometimes we can achieve more for our people in combination with other nations than we can alone. That was reinforced by the general election result. Europe is our future. Our task as politicians is to make Europe succeed for all our people, to open up its institutions and to make them accessible. It is a task that I, as a new Member, will relish.

7.57 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I know that I am profoundly privileged to make my maiden speech in this House. Many of us here, and many, many not so fortunate, have dreamt of the moment, perhaps for decades. I have faced an additional problem, as some of my colleagues have enjoyed pointing out. "You are going to have say something nice about George," they chortle. It must be admitted that Sir George Gardiner did not end his Conservative party career in a blaze of glory. I had the difficulty of representing the Conservative cause in Reigate against someone who had represented it for 25 year as a senior, and distinctive, Member of this House. I believe that, on cool reflection, he will regret the manner of his passing from his party, as many of his friends in the Conservative party in Reigate regretted deeply the impossible strain that he placed on loyalties divided between man and party.

Sir George was a resolute battler for the causes he believed in, and although many of us questioned his judgment at the end, no one could question the resolve with which he steered his chosen course. That quality served my constituents well for more than two decades. None did him more credit than his championing of the Tadworth Court children's hospital, now the Children's Trust, Tadworth. In 1982 it faced closure due to reorganisation at Great Ormond Street. Sir George and my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) led the campaign that saved it by both raising money and changing the policy of the Department of Health. I hope that it is a cause which Sir George feels he can continue to support in my constituency.

Further to that, in the primary duty of those of us sent here, no one complained and, indeed, Sir George had a fine reputation for the way in which he looked after the concerns of his individual constituents. That is a record which I can only hope to match in the time that I have the privilege to represent Reigate in the House.

Reigate is a constituency with a long parliamentary history which began as long ago as 1295 when it sent two Members to Edward I's Model Parliament at Westminster. It is said that parliamentary representation in the 14th century was regarded by boroughs such as Reigate not as a privilege but as an irksome duty, and one to be evaded whenever possible. A borough that returned Members had to find the money to pay their wages and was thus subject to a higher rate of taxation than the county. There is a lesson in that for today. If I may depart briefly from the subject of the European Union, I hope that the people of Scotland appreciate that the taxation accompanied by any Parliament can indeed become irksome. I cannot believe that the people of Scotland expect the people of England to pay for their Parliament. That would be guaranteed to be a greater cause of irritation than it was for my constituents six centuries ago.

Previous representatives of the Reigate constituency have included Charles Howard, the Lord High Admiral of the Fleet that defeated the Armada. That is not meant to be clue as to my intentions tomorrow. They also included the modestly named Julius Caesar.

Today, the constituency consists of most of the borough of Reigate and Banstead. It runs from Banstead in the north to the village of Salfords in the south. I would like to ask the boundary commissioners to have some pity on Banstead, which they have moved on every single occasion that they have had the opportunity, from one parliamentary constituency to the next. I hope that they will allow it to rest for a few decades to come in the borough in which it exists.

Chipstead is one of the most desirable parts of my constituency. My parents were lucky enough to find an Army hiring there in the 1950s. Today, Michael Reeve is one of my constituents who is fortunate enough to live in that lovely village. Unfortunately, he cannot enjoy Chipstead today or for an indefinite period because he is currently being detained in Antwerp prison by the Belgian authorities in disturbing circumstances.

Mr. Reeve has been involved in a massive reinsurance fraud. He protests his innocence. He claims that his company was the unwitting agent for two companies that were properly audited and incorporated under Belgian law, but which now seem to have been the product of organised crime.

Mr. Reeve commissioned his own private investigation and has made the report available to the Belgian authorities. His home and office have been searched by those authorities. He has twice surrendered himself voluntarily for questioning by the Belgian authorities. In the first instance, his reward was to spend Christmas and the new year in prison. When he returned in April, having been assured by his own lawyer that there were no grounds for his re-arrest, he was re-arrested and has been incarcerated since 28 April.

That spectacular fraud may take up to three years to come to trial, so why is Mr. Reeve in prison? He will not reoffend. The case is known to the whole insurance industry; no one will do business with him and his

company is going into liquidation. He cannot interfere with the evidence as his home and office have already been searched. Those are the grounds on which he is formally being held, but, in an unwise moment of candour, the judge of instruction, Mrs. Van Hoeylandt, told Mr. Reeve's lawyer that he was in prison because

"he was still not telling the truth."

That is clearly an outrageous use of detention to coerce a subject of investigation.

Mr. Reeve's appeal process, which has failed in Belgium, has uncovered another dubious attribute of the Belgian criminal justice system. There is a data link between the prosecuting authorities and the Appeal Court. The court's judgment was identical to the electronic text of the Attorney General's submission. That is clearly a breach of equal rights for the prosecution and the defence.

Mr. Reeve's detention is, of course, having the precise opposite effect to that desired by the investigators. Here is a man who was co-operating with the authorities, but who is now silent in prison because he refuses to be coerced. His only legal recourse is to the European Court of Human Rights.

That case and the condition of the justice systems across the European Union are of concern to all of us in the House. In the negotiations that have led up to the Amsterdam intergovernmental conference, proposals were put forward for inclusion in the treaty that would have allowed Belgian police officers to cross international frontiers to arrest the citizens of other nations in the European Union. Although those proposals were killed off in negotiations by the previous Government, and I trust that the Minister can confirm that they remain dead, the Government should be under no illusion as to the agenda that some of our European partners are working towards.

The village of Chipstead, to which I hope Mr. Reeve will shortly be able to return, is far from the only attractive and desirable part of my constituency. Reigate is part of London's green belt and the issues related to protecting the environment and sustaining my constituents' quality of life will dominate whatever period I have the privilege of representing the constituency.

Protecting the quality of life of all of our citizens should remain the responsibility of this Parliament. However, as our Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary prepare to go to Amsterdam, that responsibility is another of the policy areas that they have said that they intend to give away. They wish to make environmental policy across the European Union subject to qualified majority voting.

I hope that Ministers understand the potential consequences of extending qualified majority voting to article 130s of the Maastricht treaty. That will mean harmonisation of the planning process across the European Union. With an environment as rich as that of Reigate, that is not a power I believe that the United Kingdom should be surrendering. It could also mean the final surrendering of control of our energy policy. In the past 18 years, we have made the supply of energy much cheaper due to the increasing operation of the free market.

To quote from article 130s, I fear that we are about to agree to qualified majority voting on

"measures significantly affecting a member state's choice between different energy sources and the general structure of its energy supply."

I hope that the Minister can assure me that that is not the case.

Equally, the case for extending QMV to aspects of industrial, regional and social policy has not been made. It is the product of scratching around to find some seemingly innocuous concession to justify the warm embrace that Ministers have received from their colleagues in Europe. The potential consequences of those concessions are not innocuous. In industrial policy, we could find ourselves subject to the failed interventionist industrial policies of the 1960s and 1970s. There surely can be no case for exposing the United Kingdom to their possible return.

I served as a special adviser in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during most of the run-up to the intergovernmental conference. I now find myself on the Opposition Benches and I cannot help feeling rather like this century's distinguished naval occupant of Reigate Priory, who followed in the footsteps of the victor over the Armada. Admiral, the Earl Beatty, retired to Reigate priory in 1927. Two days after leaving the Admiralty, he wrote to a friend:

"It is all over and I have left my office. My work with His Majesty's Navy has come to an end, and now I am at a loose end. This Geneva conference has kept me busy up to the last thing and I do not know what the outcome will be but I am afraid that a compromising spirit will prevail among our representatives, and they will be manoeuvred into accepting something which they shouldn't."

I sincerely hope that our new Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, in their desire to enjoy the warm embrace of our partners in Europe, are not manoeuvred into accepting something that they should not at Amsterdam.

8.8 pm

Ms Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I congratulate the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) on their excellent maiden speeches. They displayed their dedication and sincerity concerning their constituents. I look forward to hearing more from them.

I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for permitting me to make my maiden speech during this important debate. It is a subject of critical importance to my constituents. At the outset, I should like to say that I fully support the Government's commitment to full participation in Europe. That commitment, combined with our domestic policies, will be of great benefit to my constituents.

I am privileged to have been elected to represent the Riverside constituency, which is renowned for its campaigning characters. My immediate predecessor, Bob Parry, was well respected in the House and in Liverpool and beyond, and I thank him for his dedication to Riverside. Bessie Braddock is still remembered, loved and revered as a champion of the people in part of my constituency. Eleanor Rathbone was elected for my constituency in 1928. She was a suffragette and one of those who began the campaign for family allowances. Her legacy is of great benefit to the whole country.

My constituency draws great strength from its diversity and its many communities. As a Labour and Co-operative Member, I applaud the community-based regeneration that has been carried out by, for example, the Eldonians in Granby, Toxteth and Dingle. Much of that has been supported by European funding. Riverside is a major area of Irish settlement with all the richness of culture that that has brought us. It has two cathedrals, and I applaud the work of the late Archbishop Warlock and

[Ms Louise Ellman]

Bishop David Sheppard in bringing communities together. It also has the Liverpool mosque and the historic Princes road synagogue.

Riverside is rich in arts. It has the Royal Liverpool philharmonic orchestra, theatres and the Liverpool institute of performing arts, which was so splendidly opened by Sir Paul McCartney a short time ago, and Liverpool is now the headquarters of the North-West film commission. All those features have great economic potential.

Of course, Liverpool has two excellent football teams, and they dominate the city. It is not possible to mention football in Liverpool without being aware of the shadow of Hillsborough. I shall continue the campaign until the truth of what happened is out and people know what really occurred on that dreadful day.

The economy of my constituency faces great difficulties. Long-term unemployment started when the transatlantic trade began to decline. It has the second highest level of unemployment in the country with over 27 per cent. male and more than 19.8 per cent. overall. Riverside ranks as one of the poorest areas in Europe and qualifies for objective 1 EU funding because its unemployment is 70 per cent. above the European average while its GDP is 77 per cent. below it. That is why about £630 million has been allocated by Europe for regeneration in the area. That money will generate £1.5 billion to regenerate the economy.

European assistance is critical. It was EU economic assistance and regeneration that started to target support, to intervene, to forge partnerships with the private sector and to lever in resources to consider needs and develop opportunities. That money has been used for investment and training, and has involved communities and been used to devise strategies. It has given birth to the innovative Merseyside special investment fund which has involved hard work with small and medium-sized businesses to develop the real regeneration in the economy, which is business.

I am pleased that the Government's new policy will build on what European funding has started to achieve in Riverside. Our policy for a north-west region development agency will give us the means to use those European funds even better. It will provide a focus and develop strategies to link that funding to private and public-sector funding in a better way than before. The new Ministry that has been created by the Government will enable transport, environment, training and job creation issues to be looked at as a whole to make maximum use of that vital European funding.

We have reached a critical point on European funding. The enlargement of Europe is on the agenda and that means that there is a question mark over the future of objective 1 funding for Liverpool. Although that money is already having an impact on Riverside, there is still much work to do. I am confident that the Government's attitude of full participation in Europe and stressing the importance of employment in all European policies will ensure that Merseyside in general and Riverside in particular will continue to benefit from objective 1 funding after the reassessment that is already in progress.

There is commitment in Riverside, and Merseyside local authorities, together with business, already have a European office in Brussels as part of a north-west presence and are working hard in Europe to bring funding here. That is important and I am confident that our Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe will work hard for Riverside to ensure that it continues to get that funding.

When I stood for the constituency, I had the honour to be proposed by Margaret Simey, who is now in her 90s, and who campaigned with Eleanor Rathbone for women's suffrage. She has campaigned for social reform, has been a Liverpool councillor and chaired Merseyside policy authority in the troubled 1980s. When she supported my candidature, she spoke about her passion for justice. I share that passion, and that means that I will work for Riverside to build strong communities and to develop a strong society. That means developing our economy and ending social exclusion. The only way that we can do that is to build a strong local economy and a strong region and link them to Europe through national policies. That is the only way to secure economic regeneration and social justice.

8.17 pm

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I am pleased to deliver my maiden speech in this important debate on the future of our country and our continent. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and the hon. Members for Harlow (Mr. Rammell) and for Liverpool, Riverside (Ms Ellman) on their maiden speeches. They delivered excellent speeches and I am sure that we shall hear more from them.

I should like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Sir Nicholas Baker. In view of the hurly-burly of the general election, many hon. Members may be forgiven for being unaware of the sad death of Nicholas Baker one week before the election. Although Parliament had been dissolved, I understand that, technically, he died while in the service of the House. Nicholas was elected in 1979 and was a most assiduous and diligent constituency representative. I got to know him 15 years ago, when he was the parliamentary vice-chairman of the Conservative party's foreign affairs forum. I was at that time deputy chairman of that organisation. He maintained a close interest in the forum and in foreign affairs in general right up until his death. In fact, just two months before his death, he published a pamphlet on Britain and the third world, under the auspices of the Conservative political centre.

Nicholas served in government as a parliamentary private secretary, as a well-respected whip and latterly, before being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, as Immigration Minister at the Home Office. Sadly, his multiple sclerosis was overtaken by the onset of cancer and, in the end, his passing was a blessed relief both to Nicholas—an intensely religious man—and to his devoted wife Carol. I am sure that the whole House sends Lady Baker and Nicholas's two children the warmest good wishes for the future.

Nicholas Baker bequeathed me a constituency that must rank among the most beautiful in the country. The little Hovis delivery boy wheeling his bicycle up the hill on our television screens has a misleading Yorkshire accent, for that is Gold hill in Shaftesbury, the ancient Saxon market

town in the northern part of my constituency of North Dorset. Although my constituency has traditionally based its economy on agriculture, which is still important today—the market at Sturminster Newton is the largest calf market in England—North Dorset's economic base is as modern as any in Britain.

Our largest private sector employer, Cobham plc at Wimborne Minster, is a major aerospace contractor. It is currently undertaking a significant part of the rebuilding of the Royal Air Force's Nimrod fleet and constructing the Phoenix battlefield reconnaissance aircraft for the Army; and it is a world leader in fuelling and refuelling systems for military aircraft. At Blandford Forum, my largest public sector employer is the rapidly expanding headquarters of the Royal Corps of Signals—the Army's computer department, at the leading edge of modern warfare.

It is the prosperity and security of Britain's engagement with our European partners that create the economic framework for all that activity. As the Prime Minister goes to Amsterdam, he asks us in this debate to take note of many and various documents; but the message he must take from the House is that Britain is a proud and independent nation which has much to contribute and much to gain from the European Union, but that it totally rejects the concept of a centralised European super-state, a European Government or a European nation. The sort of federal solution that we created in Canada, Australia and India would be neither relevant nor beneficial in modern Europe.

Lest I am accused of shifting from long-held and positive views on Britain's role in Europe and adopting a Euro-sceptic stance, let me tell the House that I believe that there is more that unites Conservative Members on the basic principles of our European engagement than might occasionally divide us on the detail. I cannot say as much of those on the Government Benches, for, as the Prime Minister goes to Amsterdam, I fear that the prosperity of my constituency, of the people of this country and of the whole of Europe is threatened.

Our prosperity is threatened by a resurgence of dirigiste, old socialist ideology in the form of the Government's commitment to the social chapter, the proposed Amsterdam employment chapter and the whole concept of adopting the European social model in our employment practices—labour market practices which have led to uncompetitiveness in continental Europe, to ever-increasing unemployment and to a 35 per cent. increase in business failures in Germany in the past two years. One cannot wonder that inward investment in Britain has grown and unemployment fallen when one compares, for example, employers' non-wage costs: for every £100 of direct wage costs in Germany, the employer has to add £31 of social costs; in Britain that additional sum averages less than half that figure, at only £15.

Speaking to fellow socialists in Sweden last week, the Prime Minister said:

> "The role of Government is not old style state intervention or heaping regulations on employers. The new way is about education, skills, new technology, developing small businesses and equipping people to survive in a completely different set of economic conditions."

Many Conservative Members could find comfort in that statement, but we immediately part company with the Government on the draft Amsterdam treaty, which proposes to incorporate protocol 14 of the Maastricht treaty—the social chapter—in the treaty itself, thereby ending Britain's opt-out. That move is supported by the Government and was an election pledge, repeated today by the Foreign Secretary. We cannot envisage what employment benefit would accrue to the United Kingdom from the new employment chapter. It would create an employment committee in Brussels to consult the social partners; and it would create incentive measures, funded by the Community budget, to provide financial assistance to the unemployed—it all sounds to me like old Europe, old Labour.

The basis of Britain's success in Europe is the very competitive nature of the single market. A rigid framework of employment laws imposed right across the continent would destroy that competitive spirit, both here and elsewhere. If the Prime Minister truly believes what he said in Malmo, he can agree to neither the social chapter nor the employment chapter.

8.26 pm

Mr. Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) on his maiden speech. It was a thoughtful speech; generous toward his predecessor and combative in relation to the issues before the House. I am sure that it will not be the last such contribution that we hear from the hon. Gentleman and I wish him well in his enjoyment of many years on the Opposition Benches.

I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary on announcing, well in advance of the summit this weekend, that they will be going to Amsterdam in order to set a new agenda for Europe. I am especially pleased that they have already spelt out that that agenda must be based on at least two of the four big issues that must be addressed: first, that in future the attention of Europe must be focused on jobs; and, second, that we cannot fiddle our way to a stable or secure future for Europe. Hon. Members may know that in the past I have got into certain difficulties for having voiced such suggestions, so I hope that I shall be allowed to enjoy this moment—long may it last.

I also want to savour the moment surrounding another event. For the past nine months, I have been privileged to be the president of the United Kingdom marches against unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion in Europe and I want to put on record the words of credit and praise that are due to the marchers. Two legs of the marches took place in Britain—two of 18 legs that are taking place across the whole of Europe, involving marchers from 30 different countries. For me, it was the first pro-European, pan-European expression of an agenda for the future—an agenda in which the rights of ordinary working people are central.

I may well be the only non-ministerial Member of the House who will be in Amsterdam next week. I shall attend the alternative summit, and it is worth noting the issues that it will seek to address.

The agenda, worked out by workers in different parts of Europe, has not been constrained by the narrowness of divides based on nationality, religion, age, gender or geography. It has been based on a desire for a European future in which jobs in one country are not stolen from the workers of another. I hope that the leaders of our countries at the European summit will hear and heed the words that are being expressed in those European marches.

[Mr. Alan Simpson]

The marchers have rightly drawn our attention to the sense that we are fiddling our way towards a European future. Several hon. Members have already drawn attention to events in France and Germany. It is worth placing on the record some of the amazing contortions that Europe has been going through to try to squeeze within the convergence criteria demanded by the Maastricht treaty. It is not only that Germany has sought to revalue its gold and foreign currency reserves. I believe that it was right for the Bundesbank to challenge that, but it is unfair to single out Germany, because Belgium has done the same. In fact, Belgium did it first and then sold the reserves, on the principle, "If we are to pool our common reserves of gold and foreign currencies, it is best to spend ours first and then share everyone else's."

Italy has come up with by far the most imaginative scam. Italians know that their debt is twice the limit demanded by the treaty of Maastricht, so they have come up with the idea of a European solidarity tax—a 10 per cent. tax increase for next year. Knowing that it would cause contention among their people, politicians reassured them by saying, "But the year after, you can have it all back, because we need to meet the debt qualification for one year only, so we shall levy the tax this year and give it back to you the year after."

If the Italians are really clever, they will not bother to collect the tax in the first place; it will be a paper transaction. At the end of the first year, they will say, "We shall levy the tax at 10 per cent. and give it back next year. It will be bureaucratic to collect and hand back, so why not call it quits?" It is a marvellous scam, but it does not address their underlying economic weaknesses.

France did it differently. The Government of the day decided to take a hefty £4.6 billion scoop out of the pension fund for France Telecom. It is a nice little scoop for a Government in difficulty, but not much fun for a worker in France Telecom who is looking forward to the protection and security that that pension fund should give.

Such fiddles are going on across the European landscape, and it is dishonest to suggest that they are an expression of pro-European sentiment. It is an Arthur Daley Europeanism. We are being invited to try to turn the clock back on the mileage of our debt, to put retreads on the level of the deficit on our tyres or to try to superglue the leaking exhaust of failed and divisive monetarist policies which the Maastricht treaty demands of us.

There is a better agenda to be found in a European future, but not by pursuing the Maastricht convergence criteria, which can and will only divide us all from one another. To go down that path is unworthy of the present and unroadworthy for the future.

There is a new convergence. I hope that, when our leaders go to Amsterdam, they will have the sense to understand that the European convergence worth grasping is the convergence of people—the human convergence on Amsterdam, which will be the first pan-European expression of hope about the shape of a people's Europe; a Europe in which we can all find a place.

That convergence, however, needs clarity on public expectations about the shape of a people's Europe. When we use the words "a flexible labour force for the future", we should remember that flexibility can come in many forms. It can come in terms of being multi-skilled, or in terms of a common desire to hold ourselves to greater account to the public we serve or to the environment we work in; but a flexible future is not the same as a future in which workers are disposable.

When we use the word "competitiveness," we need to be clear in our minds that the competition that will unite Europe is competition to raise the quality of life for us all, not one that reduces the quantity of pay for the poor. All sorts of societies have set out to raise common standards, to raise the entitlements of pensioners and to improve the infrastructure of public transport services. That is a form of competition from which we all stand to benefit; it is not competition that drives people to the bottom of the barrel.

This is the shape of a people's Europe. I am pleased that the leaders of the Labour party and of the Labour Government are saying that we must establish an agenda for a people's Europe and perhaps think the unthinkable. My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) said that we were all being encouraged to think the unthinkable; I hope that we are, because perhaps we should now address the hitherto unthinkable question of what we would do if we were to find that the unthinkable meant abandoning the unworkable.

If the single currency is to be deflationary and divisive, what shape would a pro-European agenda to succeed it take? It must be based on two remaining core principles in which I believe that we can find work and welfare for all. We should reshape European policies around two simple propositions. First, our economic policies for the next century must inevitably be shaped around the priorities of sustainability—not exploitation of the present at the cost of the future, but the sustainability of life cycles, life styles and the environment in which we live. Second, we must be willing to decide that protection of that environment takes precedence over the dogmatic, obsessive belief in the free market.

If we are to grasp the opportunities that exist within those two towering principles, it is important that we listen to the voices giving expression to them, of every one of the workers who come from different parts of Europe—each describing the destruction of their life style, community and landscape by a free market obsessed simply with consuming the present and discarding those surplus to its requirements.

As the leaders gather in Amsterdam next weekend, I hope that each one will take time, when they are talking about a people's Europe, to come out and listen to the people who have walked hundreds—in some cases, thousands—of miles to that summit to tell them what shape society should take and what place the people of Europe want in it.

8.37 pm

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): I am very grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech in this Parliament.

The hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) said that his constituency was the most beautiful in the country. I must ask him, politely, to amend the official record to make reference, possibly, to England; I shall go on to make my remarks about my constituency.

North Tayside was established by the boundary commission in 1983 and is, without word of a lie, the most beautiful seat in Scotland, from the ruggedness of the Rannoch moor to the agricultural abundance of Strathmore.

If the House will excuse the crude terminology, we produce the three Bs in North Tayside: beef, berries and booze—beef from the prime Aberdeen Angus herds, berries from the traditional berry areas around Blairgowrie and east Perthshire, and booze from several distilleries, including the smallest in the world at Edradour near Pitlochry. It is a privilege to represent the area, and I warmly thank the electorate for providing me with the opportunity to do so.

At different times, most of my constituency has been represented by colleagues from the Scottish National party. Mr. Douglas Crawford represented Perth and East Perthshire in the 1970s, and my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh) has represented the eastern parts of my constituency. I am, however, the first SNP Member to represent highland Perthshire, previously represented by the late Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas-Home. In the political history of the area, many of the Members of Parliament were leaders of the feudal structure, including the late Duchess of Atholl and, of course, Sir Alec.

Circumstances have changed, however, and at the election on 1 May the people really spoke. My immediate predecessor, Mr. Bill Walker, spoke in the House on many issues, not least the development of Europe, the subject of tonight's debate. Although we differ on that and many other issues, I pay tribute to his years of public service and wish him well.

The debate is welcome as it provides an opportunity for the House, after an important change of Government, to debate our relationship with the European Union and the issues connected with the future of the Union. Over the past 25 years, our relationship with Europe has changed from a passing interest to a position where many of the key policy areas, such as agriculture, which is vital to my constituency, are influenced more by the conduct of debate in the European institutions than they are by debate in this institution. While that process may be lamented by some, it should be recalled that it arose by voluntary agreement and collaboration among a number of member states. The common interest has been driven by a desire to move from the politics of hostility to the politics of dialogue and agreement.

It is fair to say that the approach has commanded public, although not unanimous, consent. The people recognise the advantages of collaboration in their shared interests with other people's interests. It is essential, however, that public consent to the development of the European Union is maintained, and there are grave concerns about that.

There are obviously diverging views in the United Kingdom on the importance of the European Union and how it should develop. I do not intend to devote the remainder of my speech to examining all the fault lines in Europe—I am sure that that will preoccupy members of the official Opposition over the next 24 hours and probably for some time beyond. Rather, I wish to concentrate on the fault line that has developed in the diverging interests of Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom over European policy.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) referred specifically to agriculture and fishing. I wish to follow him closely on those issues. Much has been said about the beef crisis, the ineptitude of the announcements that were made and the failure to take swift action to arrest the problem. I wish to concentrate, however, on the previous Government's inability to secure a regional or zonal lifting of the European beef ban as a first step towards lifting the ban throughout the United Kingdom. That failure was recorded against a background of the European Union's willingness to consider such a move if only the British Government had requested it.

The root of the previous Government's failure lay in their unwillingness to confront the deficiencies of the English dairy herd, where there is a much greater incidence of BSE, and allow other herds, such as those from Scotland or Northern Ireland, to escape from the ban to a quality-assured environment.

Here we see the fault line of the policy. In the Government's European actions, Scotland's needs are being ignored. I hope that the new Government will warmly embrace the concept of a zonal lifting of the beef ban and deliver a solution to the crisis in the Scottish beef industry as an immediate priority. As an aside, I urge the Government to tread carefully before dishing out idle threats about beef wars and import bans. No one is more concerned than I am about low-quality beef imports into the UK, but last week the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food sounded remarkably like his predecessor in some of his dire threats—a record I am sure the current Minister would not wish to equal.

The previous Government also betrayed our fishing communities, repeatedly trading away the industry's interests in Europe in pursuit of other priorities. I scarcely need tell the House about the depth of the quota hopping crisis, which sees a quarter of UK tonnage under flags of convenience and more than 40 per cent. of certain quotas lost to Scotland and the UK.

The solution must come through a treaty amendment; tinkering at the edges with regulations will not be good enough. Yet the fishing industry is not even mentioned in the consolidated draft treaty. We need an assurance from the Government that they will insist on the accession of a suitable protocol, agreed with the industry, to ensure that we can bring to a halt the loss of quota and tonnage from the Scottish fleet. A Scottish Government would put that issue at the top of their agenda. Will the UK Government do the same?

The solution to those diverging interests is for Scotland to opt for the natural state of independence, with a direct voice for our country as a sovereign nation in Europe. That would give Scotland an equal and effective voice in European discussions, enabling us to assert our case and put our arguments on a par with every other state. Accountability for the articulation of Scotland's natural and national interests will be maintained by Scotland's democratic Parliament.

We need only look at small nations such as Ireland and Denmark, which, by using their influence in Europe wisely, are contributing positively to the development of Europe and the international community, and delivering economic prosperity and social progress to their people at home. The model of the small nation in Europe is positive for Scotland.

[Mr. John Swinney]

The Government are advancing proposals to change the constitutional arrangements for Scotland and it would be churlish of me not to concede that their proposals will be considered by the House sooner than the House will consider a demand from Scotland to proceed to independence.

I urge the Government to use the opportunity to include within that legislation a direct voice for Scotland in Europe—not quiet observer status but real teeth to allow a Scottish Parliament to influence the decisions of Europe in the best interests of Scotland and her people. In his address to the Scottish Grand Committee on 13 January this year, the present Foreign Secretary admitted that representatives of a devolved Scottish Parliament would have only observer status. I urge the Government to strengthen that weak proposal.

May I conclude by setting out some of the key points on which the Government should reflect in preparation for the intergovernmental conference? As the European Union wrestles with the controversy and uncertainty of economic and monetary union, a partnership must be created between convergence and cohesion in pursuit of further voluntary and effective collaboration. The Maastricht treaty did not deliver that partnership. It set out an agenda for convergence, but paid no attention to the consequences of meeting the convergence criteria. If economic and monetary union is to take its course—it looks in a perilous condition at present—it must not be at the expense of employment, or public confidence in the project will continue to erode.

We must ensure that, in the next stage of the process of European collaboration, the issue of public consent is to the fore. Too many ill-informed contributions to the European debate have been made. They feed public anxiety, but do not satisfy the public's appetite for information.

If the Government and their European partners can learn any lessons from the past five years, they should conclude that the model of British relations with Europe or the British debate on the future of Europe is not a model to be followed. Instead, the Government and their European partners should concentrate on establishing a partnership between economic convergence and social cohesion, and rebuilding public confidence in the process of European development.

8.47 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Like most hon. Members, I have sat here for almost five and a quarter hours. I was formerly a Member of the European Parliament. I had the privilege of being there between 1979 and 1984. An interesting aspect of the European Parliament was that we knew when we were speaking, whether we were speaking and for how long. That important facility enabled us all to plan our lives much better than we can under the present arrangements in the House of Commons. If anybody spoke longer than their allotted time, the time was taken off the other member of their political group, so it was a good restraint on us to keep our comments within a certain time. I should like to see many other facilities in the European Parliament translated to this place. I am grateful to have had an opportunity to go to the European Parliament before coming to this House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), said that he had changed his mind. Like me, he campaigned in 1975 against membership of the European Union and then changed his mind. I, too, changed my mind. I went in on an anti-EC ticket, but changed my mind two and a half years later. I am not ashamed of saying that. It is important to have the right to change one's mind when circumstances show the error of one's ways. I wish that more politicians would change their minds more often. We would have better politics if, every so often, people stood up and said, "I'm sorry, but I have changed my mind."

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) on his maiden speech. He advanced some interesting ideas, some of which I agreed with and some of which I did not. One of the stoutest campaigners in the European Parliament on behalf of Scottish fishermen was a member of his party, Winifred Ewing, who made a valuable contribution to the debates.

I changed my mind because I recognised the importance of working with people from other nationalities for common interests. When we first went to the European Parliament as a small Labour group of 17 MEPs in 1979, we were extremely unpopular. We were unpopular with our socialist friends because they were disappointed that so few of us had been elected to the European Parliament. We became unpopular also because the majority of our group were opposed to membership of the European Union.

It is interesting, however, that when people of different nationalities work together from day to day, they rub corners off one another. They have to co-exist. I would advise my right hon. Friends not to go to the European Union and lecture the other member countries. They deeply resent that, particularly if one suggests that one has a better solution for the people of the EU than have other countries. Most of the other countries are after the same solutions as we are.

After all, the European Union was set up initially because countries had fought one another in two world wars. It was an attempt to co-operate for the peace and security of Europe. That is one of the main reasons why I support enlargement of the EU and more powers for the European Parliament. MEPs are elected Members, as we are, and we cannot tell elected Members that they may not have powers to do the things for which they were elected. The European Parliament cannot be expected to run a race and achieve its goals if it is hobbled.

When I was a Member of that Parliament, I thought that it might take 20 years for the European Parliament to acquire the powers that we have. I now realise that that timetable was unrealistic and that it could take 50 years to achieve the powers that that Parliament should have.

I am glad that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have gone to Europe with a different attitude from that of the previous Government. It is interesting to see how strongly they have been welcomed by other leaders of the EU, who realise that we want to co-operate with them, that we do not want constant conflict, that we do not look down on them and that we see them as equal partners with us in the EU.

The Amsterdam conference has a limited agenda. I do not know what people are huffing and puffing about when they suggest that it will change the course of history.

I hope that the leadership of my party will provide the vision that was missing in the previous representation from this country. The approach was grudging, confrontational and not conducive to good working relationships with other countries. I am certain that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the rest of the team will have an entirely different attitude.

Some changes are necessary. There must be a reform of the common agricultural policy and a crackdown on fraud. Something must be done about the massive number of unemployed in Europe. I remember being at the European Parliament in 1982 with Barbara Castle, when we wore black sashes because the then Employment Secretary, now Lord Tebbit, came to the European Parliament and made a speech which we thought was totally insensitive to the needs of the unemployed in Europe. As I recall, we wore sashes with the words "8 million unemployed". Since then, of course, matters have become far worse. Only by co-operation with the other countries of Europe will we be able to tackle the problem.

I find all the talk of sovereignty nonsensical. Bernard Crick said some time ago that sovereignty was an idea dreamt up by those who wanted to retain power for themselves, to frighten the smaller nations into believing that London knew best, and that anyone who put a foot out of step was in danger of doing damage. I think that sovereignty is an outdated, 18th century Whig concept and that it is time that we moved into the real world.

Member countries should take steps to ensure that the European Parliament has one seat. It is ridiculous that the Parliament hops from place to place, and that many of the institutions are based in yet another country—Luxembourg, Strasbourg and Brussels. It is costly, there is no need for it, and it is up to the member Governments to reach a decision on a single place of work for the EC.

What is the need for the Economic and Social Committee? I know that I may be offending many people who may have placed Members on the committee, and some of my friends may sit on that committee, but what necessity is there for the Economic and Social Committee, which costs member countries £18 million a year and merely mirrors the work of the European Parliament? I could understand the need for it when there was no directly elected Parliament, but it seems a pointless beast now, when there is an elected Parliament. I ask our Government and the Governments of other member countries to consider whether that institution is any longer necessary.

It was a great privilege for me to serve in the European Parliament. I believe strongly in the European Union. I want to see it develop, but it is making slow progress. When the time is right, I want us to join the European monetary union. That must be the next step in the development of the EU. Again, I say that countries that fought one another in two major wars have now worked together for a long period in peace and stability. I believe that the European Union contributes to that.

8.58 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech on my third attempt—I have probably clocked up about 17 hours in the Chamber waiting to be called. I appreciated the comments of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) and I hope that someone, somewhere was listening.

I pay tribute to my predecessor, the last Member of Parliament for the constituency of Richmond and Barnes, who I understand was a well-loved Member of the House. He was a friendly, honest man who had a great sense of humour. I believe that he was also an excellent mimic. He gave distinguished service as a Minister in various portfolios—Northern Ireland, Defence and the Foreign Office—and as chairman of the Conservative party. I was somewhat puzzled that he did not mention his last post in his address during the election campaign. He served his constituents very well and I hope to equal his performance. In short, I was sad to defeat him in the election—although I am very glad that I did. To use his words, I am sure that he views it as an exhibition of high spirits on the part of the electorate.

The constituency of Richmond Park is a new one, comprising most of the old Richmond and Barnes constituency plus five wards of Kingston. It is part of Greater London—I will not tell hon. Members how beautiful it is, because we are all bored with beautiful constituencies—where the countryside comes to town. Kingston and Richmond have much in common. As well as the River Thames, both areas have very royal connections. Saxon kings were crowned in the centre of Kingston, the Tudor monarchs lived in Richmond, and Elizabeth I died in Richmond palace, close to Richmond green. The remnants of that palace can still be seen today. The Hanoverian kings lived, played and reared children around Kew green, where I live. Perhaps eclipsing all the great monarchs of the past, my constituency is also the home of Sir James Goldsmith—the founder of the Referendum party, who did so much to help the Conservatives in the run-up to the last election.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have worked as a doctor in the health service for 30 years, so you would expect me to mention the NHS in my maiden speech. My concerns for my constituents centre on the fate of Queen Mary's hospital in Roehampton. The hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) made an excellent speech on the subject on Friday morning, so I shall not go into detail now. However, I stress that Queen Mary's in the Richmond Park constituency is losing most of its services and that Kingston hospital is showing signs that it simply cannot cope with the extra patients. I urge the Minister of State, Department of Health to undertake a review of London hospitals as a matter of urgency. We were promised the terms of that review last week, but they have not materialised. If decisions are not made urgently, lives will be lost next winter.

The most pressing problem facing Richmond Park concerns the environment. Richmond upon Thames has a very good record in that area, having achieved the last Government's target for recycling two years ago—five years ahead of schedule. We already collect 25 per cent. of household waste. However, the problems of noise and air pollution transcend borough and national boundaries. The closure of Hammersmith bridge has added significantly to our problems, and the lack of a strategic London authority is slowing down decisions about repairing the bridge.

Another major concern in Richmond Park—which poses probably the greatest threat to our environment—is the proposed fifth terminal at Heathrow airport. The airport is a great polluter in Richmond Park, causing both noise and traffic pollution. The previous Government's aviation policy was an appalling combination of

[Dr. Jenny Tonge]

protection for privatised monopolies at the expense of the environment. The imagery of the second world war was conjured up time and again when we were told that Frankfurt would become the air travellers' hub of Europe if terminal 5 did not go ahead. When terminal 4 was approved, the inspector told the public inquiry:

"Terminal 4 should be the last major expansion at Heathrow".

That was the first condition for the approval of terminal 4.

The then Under-Secretary of State for Trade, Norman Tebbit, assured everyone that the Government would not permit the construction of a fifth terminal and that the cap on flights would be enforced. That has not happened and the number of flights has increased by 50 per cent. The people of Richmond Park have no faith in capping and I urge the Government to make clear their intention to honour the undertaking that terminal 4 would be the last major expansion at the airport, which the previous Member for Brentford and Isleworth described as "the neighbour from hell".

When the Deputy Prime Minister was shadow Secretary of State for Transport, he said, in *The Observer* of 7 February 1993, that the then Government's aviation policy was "absurd". On their policy of expansion at Heathrow, he said:

"There will ultimately be more flights over the most congested airway in Europe, at great cost to the environment and to congestion around Heathrow."

As the Deputy Prime Minister said then, now is the time to think afresh. If he needs reminding, I ask Labour Members to ask him whether he would like to have dinner at my house in Richmond Park. A lounge suit will do—we do not always dress for dinner in Richmond. He could stay the night and enjoy the noise and air pollution that we have to suffer day in, day out, week in, week out. I moved there 25 years ago, which is a long time to learn about aircraft movement.

I urge the Government to work with our European partners at Amsterdam. In aviation, competition, verging on conflict, is accepted. Must we inflict more and more suffering on the people of my constituency just to stop France and Germany winning the air transport war? Environmental damage is of international concern and I urge the Government to put it high on the agenda at Amsterdam.

In conclusion, I place on record my constituents' determination to fight the threat of terminal 5 at Heathrow, which is a big environmental disaster for our area. If the House thinks that Swampy said it all, you ain't seen nothing yet.

9.6 pm

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I am not sure about the protocol of one maiden speaker complimenting another, but I should like to compliment the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on her maiden speech. As a student of history, I found her description of the history of her constituency fascinating. Many of us have visited it because of its historical links. I am sure that we all agree that it is beautiful.

I noted with interest the hon. Lady's comments on pollution and noise from aeroplanes. We are trying to expand Blackpool airport. We want the best mix of more airport traffic and the minimum of pollution.

I am grateful to be called to make my maiden speech in such an important debate which covers so many complex areas. I feel very privileged to be the first Member of Parliament for the new constituency of Blackpool, North and Fleetwood. I am grateful to the electorate for allowing me to represent them.

Although my constituency has substantially redrawn boundaries, I should like to say a few words about Harold Elletson, the previous Member for Blackpool, North. He built a reputation in the House as an expert on eastern Europe and Russia. He is a fluent Russian speaker and brought his expert knowledge to bear on the often complex issues raised by the fall of the iron curtain and the disintegration of the Russian empire. We disagreed on many other topics, but I acknowledge his expertise in certain areas of foreign policy and I certainly cannot compete with him when it comes to speaking Russian.

Maiden speeches are an opportunity to describe one's constituency. I am sure that the Blackpool part of my constituency needs little introduction. Hon. Members will have visited it to attend conferences, if not on holiday. Blackpool is the nation's favourite holiday resort, offering a wide variety of choices for visitors. It has large, internationally known hotels along the north shore and many smaller, family-run hotels and guest houses behind the promenade, offering their famous friendly service. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will acknowledge the importance of the tourism industry to this country and that he will, perhaps, in discussions with his European colleagues look at integrating a European tourism strategy with the strategy for this country. I encourage as many hon. Members as possible to come and enjoy Blackpool's wonderful facilities.

My constituency stretches from Blackpool's north pier and follows the coast beyond the boundary of Blackpool to Thornton Cleveleys. Here, visitors find a quiet residential area with a bustling centre which attracts coachloads of visitors to its thriving shops. The more adventurous visitor may, however, stay on the tram from Blackpool as it completes its journey all the way to Fleetwood.

Fleetwood has a fascinating history. It takes its name from Sir Peter Hesketh-Fleetwood whose dream it was in the early 19th century to establish a commercial port and holiday resort on his land adjoining Morecambe bay. Sir Peter modelled his new town of Fleetwood on another purpose-built seaside resort, St. Leonards on Sea near Hastings, and commissioned a renowned London architect, Decimus Burton, to design the town. He was determined that Fleetwood would be a splendid place to attract his friends from London and visitors from all over the country. He even built a new railway to link London Euston to the North Euston station in Fleetwood. Some of the original buildings still exist, although not the railway station. In 1847, Queen Victoria visited Fleetwood and many of the streets in the town were named after members of the royal family in honour of the visit.

Although the area that I represent is best known for tourism, many of my constituents work for three large local employers—the civil service, British Nuclear Fuels and British Aerospace, which was mentioned earlier in the debate. We all acknowledge the importance of the Eurofighter project to the local economy not only of Blackpool, North and Fleetwood but of the whole of Lancashire.

It is because of Fleetwood's role as a fishing port that I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate on Europe. To most of the people of Fleetwood, Europe means one issue—fishing quotas and the regulations that govern the lives of those who work in what is, unfortunately, a dramatically reduced fishing industry. I therefore welcome this debate and the motion, which refers to

"the determination of Her Majesty's Government to focus the agenda of the European Union on policies of direct benefit to the peoples of Europe through its initiatives on employment and competitiveness".

I ask the Foreign Secretary not to lose sight of the importance of the fishing industry to my constituents and to other fishing ports around these shores when he has discussions with his European colleagues on the general initiatives on employment. I understand that fishing is not specifically on the agenda for the forthcoming summit, but it is clearly vital to those who are interested in Europe as well as in protecting their own fishing industries.

Beyond doubt, in recent years our fishermen have faced severe and increasing difficulties in striving to operate viably and legitimately under the European common fisheries policy. Urgent solutions are required if our industry is to survive, and we should address especially the issue of quota hopping, which was mentioned earlier. Some 26 per cent. of the quota allocated by Brussels to British fishermen is caught by quota hoppers. Fleetwood has a wonderful museum outlining its fascinating past and celebrating its role as a fishing port. The trawler Jacinta is moored and preserved as a museum piece. It would be dreadful, however, if our children lived in a world where the fishing fleet existed only in museums and in history books. I share my right hon. Friends' belief in strong leadership in Europe that focuses on employment and competitiveness so that Fleetwood has a future as well as a past.

9.13 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I congratulate the hon. Members for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on their maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood lived up to her name. Both hon. Members will fulfil their aspirations and match the reputations of the previous Members for those constituencies.

The Foreign Secretary made great play of quoting policies of direct benefit to the peoples of Europe, particularly initiatives on employment and competitiveness. Perhaps the Government should reconsider the fact that their proposed windfall tax was designed to help young people in particular. I gather that they intend to use the proceeds to help the 250,000 young people who are out of work. They may be interested to know that fewer than 200,000 young people stand to benefit. The Government should accept that, by introducing a minimum wage, they will put 250,000 young people out of work, so they will need to introduce the windfall tax to compensate them.

The Foreign Secretary said that the concept of sister parties was unknown to the Conservatives. I remind the Government that we pioneered the concept of sister parties within the European Union, not least through our membership of the European Democratic Union and the Christian Democratic Union.

I wish also to bring to the Government's attention the fact that the French centre-right Government's failure to return to power was not due to their preparations for economic and monetary union; it was because they were implementing an austerity package and pursuing the same Thatcherite policies that we pursued since 1979, and that are now embraced by the Government—low inflation, low interest rates, low unemployment and privatisation of national industries.

By signing up to the social chapter, we would lose us our right to choose. The director general of the Confederation of British Industry said:

"If you sign up to the Social Chapter you can't actually be sure that you will have your way, because some directives will be covered by qualified majority voting. There is however a way to pick and choose and that is available for the Labour Party if it wants to have it as its policy. The way to pick and choose is actually not to sign up to the Social Chapter".

I invite the Government, therefore, not to sign up to the social chapter but to continue the opt-out negotiated by the previous Government.

The Foreign Secretary referred to his "modest" objective of signing up to an additional employment chapter. That is not a modest objective. I am fearful as to its consequences and how it would be interpreted: for instance, notably, the working time directive and health and safety provisions would inevitably have unhappy consequences for the United Kingdom.

May I seek in my humble capacity as a new Member to give the Cabinet some advice on which policies need to be reformed before we proceed to enlarge the European Union, as the Foreign Secretary intends? Principally, reform of the common agricultural policy should have regard not just to environmental guidelines but to rural development policy. I invite the Government to inform us tonight whether they intend to follow that course.

A number of Labour Members have spoken about the objective 1 benefits which the European social fund and the European regional development fund bring to their constituencies. Obviously, such assistance is dependent on additional government funding. Will the Chief Secretary to the Treasury inform us whether he intends to continue with that additional funding in the foreseeable future and to what extent he envisages radical reform of the European social fund and the European regional development fund and, in particular, discontinuation of the cohesion policy, which seems to be relevant only to the Mediterranean countries?

I invite the Government to revise the timetable for economic and monetary union, recognising the fact that no member state other than Luxembourg will be in a position to join by 1 January 1999. I invite them also to sign up to the fact that the best European social and employment practice is that achieved under the previous Government, and that should form the basis of any social and employment chapter.

On behalf of those of us who continue to have the pleasure of serving in the European Parliament, I invite the Government to consider that there should be less rivalry and more of a partnership between the House and the European Parliament. I should like to voice my reservations about the proposals in the Government motion and I beg the House to accept the Opposition amendment.

9.19 pm

Mr. David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I should start with an apology on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. There are compelling reasons why he cannot be present for the winding-up speeches. I know that Government Front Benchers understand, as I hope does the rest of the House.

This has been an important and interesting debate. To use the words of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), I, too, speak as a European. I found that I agreed with much of what he said, and I shall return to that. It is traditional in European debates that I embarrass my namesake, the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), by complimenting his speeches. He made a particularly penetrating speech in this debate.

A number of formidable speeches and seven very confident maiden speeches were made. I am sure that if I said that I agreed with the speeches of the hon. Members for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), for Liverpool, Riverside (Ms Ellman), for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney), for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), I would damage their careers irrevocably, so I shall say simply that they variously gave confident, generous, amusing, articulate, earnest, and across the board, brave speeches. The European Union is an intimidating subject on which to make one's maiden speech. Since I did something similar a decade ago, I know just how they feel.

Two Conservative Members made maiden speeches in the debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) for paying a very nice tribute to Sir Nicholas Baker, who was in the Whips Office with me some years ago. He was a very good friend who, as my hon. Friend said, passed away during the election campaign. My hon. Friend gave a very clear, simple, insightful and thoughtful speech on the damage that the rigid framework of law would do to competitiveness in this country, a matter to which I shall return.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) is a friend from his previous capacity as a special adviser at the Foreign Office. He has crafted more of my words than I care to admit. He did a rather better job of delivering his words in his maiden speech than I sometimes did on his behalf. He gave a confident, erudite, expert and incisive speech, in which he did two notable things. First, he raised the treatment of his constituent, Mr. Reeve, by the Belgian police and judicial system. I hope that the Government will take that on board and act to help his constituent. I feel that natural justice demands that. Secondly, he made some insightful points about some of the detailed effects of the extension of qualified majority voting, especially in the environmental area. That needs a little more thought than has been given to it so far.

Of the formidable speeches, the one that stands out most in my mind was that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley). He made a number of points to which I hope the Chief Secretary to the Treasury will be able to respond. He picked up a number of the points that will come up in negotiations in Amsterdam, particularly the need to make subsidiarity justiciable—a point that we drove home when we were in government. I hope that the new Government will continue to do so.

My right hon. Friend explained clearly the conundrum of the European Court of Justice—the supreme court—whose judgments can never be reversed. We had come up with fairly modest proposals for dealing with that, of which I have seen little since the change of Government. I should like to hear what will be done.

My right hon. Friend raised general fears about the massive extension of powers of the European Parliament through co-decision and the implications that that has for this Parliament's powers. He also dealt with the general question of extension of competence of the European Union, which also affects our national sovereignty.

Two other matters that were raised specifically require replies. One was the legal personality of the court, which was raised by my right hon. Friends the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Tonbridge and Malling and by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), who was significantly concerned about it.

The final issue that I hope the Chief Secretary will cover is quota hopping, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) in her maiden speech, by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) and others.

Several hon. Members raised the most immediate issue facing the Union—the single currency. We face a stark and simple truth. We can see it and almost every economic commentator can see it, so why cannot the Government see the simple truth about the single currency? That truth is that economic and monetary union cannot start safely on 1 January 1999. A monetary union based on fudged criteria between countries whose economies show little genuine economic convergence would be the most disastrous economic mistake that Europe has made for many decades. I may tell—I nearly said my hon. Friend—my friend the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) that that is not just the Euro-sceptics' view: it is shared by many eminent people with impeccable European credentials, who are greatly concerned about the future of the European structure. On that basis, we should treat the issue seriously.

For many months, the Conservatives have pointed out that there is little chance of sufficient convergence for EMU to start on time. We were the first to call for delay. Matters have now moved on and we have made a clear assessment of the events of the past few weeks. After the fiasco of the revaluation of the German gold reserves and the upheaval of the French elections, the only sensible conclusion is that monetary union cannot start safely on 1 January 1999.

I took especial note of the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) when he said that the German revaluation was technically correct. However, as the Bundesbank itself pointed out, it was a single-year adjustment and convergence is supposed to be a permanent condition. Whichever way one looks at the revaluation, it is a case of creative accounting.

Monetary union matters to Britain. More than half of our trade in goods is with the European Union. Britain has a strong interest in a thriving European economy. British exporters will not be queuing up to thank their elected representatives if we fail to warn our European partners of the dangers of a monetary union based on fudged or inappropriate criteria. That is why we should send the clearest possible message that 1 January 1999 is no longer an option. It is all the more astonishing, therefore, that the Government continue to keep the 1 January 1999 option

open. I hope that in the Government's eagerness to cosy up to their new friends in Europe, they do not allow their judgment of the situation to be clouded.

When the Bundesbank exposed the German Government's plans for revaluation of the gold reserves as a fudge too far, we took its side. Where were the Government at that crucial moment? When the French elections put a further spoke in the wheel, we made it clear that the start date could no longer be safely achieved. Where were the Government? The Government claim that they will offer strong leadership. On this issue, above all others, they must start to do so. The Government should make it clear that they will oppose any country that tries to enter EMU with figures based on creative accounting.

I shall turn now to the questions raised by Amsterdam. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition mentioned several areas in which we agree with the Government's aims and objectives. For example, he spoke eloquently of the importance of enlargement and the attendant reforms that we both believe to be necessary. Because I have limited time, I will focus on the areas that divide the Government and the Opposition. I am sure that that will be a relief for the Foreign Secretary.

The Prime Minister waltzed into Europe after the election, smiling and hailing a new era. A week ago in Noordwijk, he said:

"We will be in the middle of Europe"

as a strong player playing for a

"radical shift in Europe's horizons".

At the weekend, in Malmo, he said that Europe "must modernise or die". New Labour, old slogans. What do those slogans mean? Will the Prime Minister try to prove to the Europeans that the European social model has failed? Will he persuade them overnight to lift the burdens that have damaged European industry so much in the past few years? Sadly, all the optimistic rhetoric is matched only by a gloomy reality. So far, the Government's commitments seem to be to end the British veto on industrial, regional and environmental policy and to sign up to the social chapter and the employment chapter. Their rhetoric says one thing; their actions say another.

It should come as no surprise that European socialist leaders have rejoiced at Labour's victory. Today, we are witnessing a new dawn of socialism across Europe, as the Foreign Secretary was the first to admit. Writing in the *New Statesman* on 6 September 1996, he said that a Labour Government would mean that, for the first time, there would be a socialist majority at the European Council. This would enable a socialist agenda to be pushed through, and he pretty much repeated that statement today. This new agenda is just the sort that many European leaders have been dreaming of—no wonder they threw a welcome party for Labour in Noordwijk last month. Now the French socialists have joined their ranks. Good news for socialists; bad news for prosperity.

Labour will sign the social chapter and is willing to give up the veto, but the incoherence of its position is demonstrated by the fact that it argues already with the social chapter's provisions. It is unsurprising that Commission officials are frustrated. They say, "If you pledge to sign the social chapter, you accept its measures," and they are right. We say, "Do not sign the social chapter and you will not have its measures forced upon you." We cannot have it both ways.

We need to keep the veto. In the words of one commentator, "You cannot throw away your umbrella and hope it does not rain." My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition negotiated our opt-out because it was in Britain's interests to do so. It may not have made us particularly popular in the eyes of some of our neighbours, but it was the right thing for Britain. We have reaped the vast rewards of flexibility and openness. We are not interested in saying, "We will play ball," and then complaining when the game gets too rough. That does not make sense.

We were told last month when the Prime Minister met European leaders in Holland that we could expect no new measures beyond those covered by majority voting within the social chapter. This month, we learnt of new measures just days after the Prime Minister's assurance. Last week, plans were revealed that businesses employing as few as 50 people must set up works councils to consult employees on company policy. In other words, there will be a massive extension of the already controversial works council directive, brought in under the social chapter. If implemented, the new proposals will sit heavily on the shoulders of small and medium-sized firms which already struggle with enough red tape.

How did the new Government react to the news? A Downing street spokesman confirmed that the Prime Minister would reject the proposal.

"If this does not fit in with job creation and business success we will not have it",

he said. That is all very reassuring, but inaccurate if one is acquainted with the reality. Labour is fully aware that much of the social chapter operates under qualified majority voting, but it is aware that once it signs up to it, its ability to pick and choose will be severely limited.

What is more, Labour knows full well that the European works council directive—which Commissioner Flynn now proposes to extend—was adopted under qualified majority voting, which means no Labour veto. The only way to prevent these proposals is by forming a blocking minority. Since most of the countries of Europe other than ourselves and Ireland already face the burden of similar legislation, I can see very little chance of defeating the proposal. Even if—in a fit of sympathy for a new Government—they were allowed to drop it this year, it will, like all other Commission proposals, be back on the table to be re-submitted next year and the year after that until it is written in the stone of European labour law. The measure will not be the last. We will see regulation after regulation destroying jobs in Britain, as has occurred in Europe.

Labour has long attempted to reassure nervous business men that the entrails of the social chapter are negotiable. The new Prime Minister was the first to spawn this line at the CBI conference in 1995. He said of the social chapter:

"Each piece of legislation will be judged on its merits. I have no intention whatever of agreeing to anything and everything that emerges from the EU. Proposals are just that: proposals. And they will be examined, with you, on their merit".

At the time, he was warned. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) quoted the response given by the director general of the Confederation of British Industry, Mr. Adair Turner, but it bears repetition. He said:

"If you sign up to the Social Chapter you can't actually be sure that you will have your way, because some directives will be covered by qualified majority voting. There is however a way to

pick and choose and that is available for the Labour Party if it wants to have it as its policy. The way to pick and choose is actually not to sign up to the Social Chapter".

I offer the Government a piece of advice that has been given by a number of Opposition Members. It is not too late for them to change their mind. A U-turn is a small sacrifice to pay for the sake of jobs and prosperity. If jobs mean so much to the Government—I certainly believe them when they say that they do—they will do the honourable thing. The best way to pick and choose is not to sign. Outside the social chapter, they can pick and choose to their heart's content.

Earlier, someone shouted across the Chamber, "The majority." With its majority, the Labour party can carry any new law it wants. If it wishes, it can implement every piece of law in the social chapter through this Parliament. What the Government propose, however, is to take that right away from Parliament for ever—a point made cogently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling and implicitly by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, in his comments on the importance of the rights of Parliament and our national decisions in our national democracies.

The social chapter is not the sole case. Every risk that applies to the social chapter also applies to giving up the veto on industrial and regional policies. It looks as though the hard-won Conservative prosperity of the 1990s is set to be buried by a new socialist agenda of red tape and regulation. In the 1970s, Labour's disastrous economic record consisted of employment protection Acts that destroyed jobs, industrial policies that destroyed industries and regional policies that laid waste Britain's industrial regions. At least in 1979 this Parliament could sweep away the disastrous policies of the socialist 1970s. No future British Parliament could unilaterally correct the consequences of giving up our sovereignty in this way.

What the Government propose to give away in Amsterdam will give us the catastrophic policies of the 1970s, but made irreversibly in Brussels. Of course, that is the Prime Minister's pay-off to the unions, as the head of the European Trades Union Congress and, indeed, the head of the British TUC have now effectively admitted. Finally, we are about to discover the true meaning of new Labour—Conservative words and socialist consequences.

The contrast between Conservative and Labour on Europe is stark and sobering. We have a clear, modern vision of Europe as a partnership of nations with Britain co-operating closely with its continental neighbours, but firmly saying no to being part of the drive towards a European state. All Conservatives, without exception, share that strong determination to preserve our independence.

Labour, by contrast, is incoherent and muddled. One day, the Prime Minister swears that he will never be isolated in Europe, the next he says that he is proud to be isolated. One day, the Prime Minister pledges to be a friend of the EU by abandoning the national veto in numerous areas, the next he or his Ministers are threatening to use it. One day, he says that the proposals on the social chapter would benefit Britain, the next he is trying to reassure business men that he will oppose such proposals, omitting to admit that he could be outvoted.

Labour does not have a policy on Europe. It has a posture on Europe—a posture that changes from audience to audience. The sad truth is that Labour has bought a season ticket on the line of least resistance. It is a season ticket whose price will be paid by the people of Britain—a price that will be extremely high.

Conservative Governments have won the British budget rebate, the single currency opt-out and other brief victories by being tough, effective negotiators. By contrast, Labour is inexperienced and sometimes naive. The Prime Minister will go to Amsterdam alone among all the European Heads of Government in having already announced to the world the national surrenders that he intends to make without even a promise of anything in return.

Within six weeks of a general election victory, Labour has already proclaimed six surrenders: four surrenders of veto, submission to the social chapter and a European Union jurisdiction on employment. Once combined, those commitments will create an ever-open door for Brussels-driven labour law and over-regulation.

That is what the unions want and what has done most of the damage to jobs in Europe. It is a European employment time bomb, and it is only a matter of time before it goes off. The damage to British jobs and prosperity will be irrevocable; the damage to Britain's ability to compete will be permanent and savage; and the damage to Britain's sovereignty and standing will be for ever. No British Government should do that lightly.

9.39 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): That was pretty desperate stuff. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis) certainly came out of his Euro-closet tonight; he will be in some difficulties if the next leader of his party is the shadow Chancellor. That may be the first and last speech that we hear from him on this subject.

I shall return to what the right hon. Gentleman said shortly, but, first, I should like to refer to the numerous maiden speeches made this evening. The first was from my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), who spoke generously of his predecessor and of Stan Newens and made the important point that our party has returned to power after re-engaging itself with those natural supporters with whom it lost touch in the 1970s and 1980s. That has some relevance for Europe. It is important that Europe is re-engaged with the people whom the European institutions are supposed to serve.

The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) spoke with some feeling about what a difficult act his predecessor was to follow. His predecessor is one of the few people in the country who would probably crawl to get here for a debate such as this—but he spoke well of him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Ms Ellman) spoke about the increasing problem of social exclusion in Liverpool and in many such areas, where it is important that we act and are seen to act, in terms of both domestic and European policy.

The hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) spoke movingly of Sir Nicholas Baker; all those who knew or came into contact with him were extremely sorry and sad to learn of his death just before the election. He was a man of great integrity, who spoke his mind. Our thoughts are with his family.

The hon. Member for North Dorset said that his constituency was the most beautiful in Britain, as did the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney). When the

rain eases off in North Tayside and I am able to see it, I can corroborate his evidence, as it is indeed a beautiful constituency. He, too, spoke well of his predecessor, Bill Walker, whom we shall miss for various reasons.

We shall also miss Jeremy Hanley, of whom the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) spoke with some affection. While he was chairman of the Conservative party, we all regarded him with a great deal of affection; we were sorry when he moved on.

The hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble), who wants an airport, unlike the hon. Member for Richmond Park, spoke of the importance of the fishing industry, as did the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor). Making progress on quota hopping, in particular, is a matter to which the Government attach great importance.

Right hon. and hon. Members will have seen that the House is approving a number of documents to end the formal parliamentary scrutiny procedure. The scrutiny procedure now ends and the Government can make progress not only on the intergovernmental conference, the broad economic guidelines and the assessment of the 1996 guidelines, but on the three proposals relating to economic and monetary union, the stability and growth pact, the legal framework of the euro and the new exchange rate mechanism.

The stability pact was referred to by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). It is important to say a word about European monetary union. The speech of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden had a flavour of sour grapes towards everything to do with Europe. That is part of the problem of the Conservative party at the moment.

Very few Conservatives can talk about Europe without a whiff of dislike and distrust of everything European. It is no wonder that they made so little progress with our European partners. They seem blinded by prejudice, to the extent that we now hear that Helmut Kohl is a socialist. He and many others may find that difficult to believe.

It is not so long since the Leader of the Opposition had to break off the general election campaign to appeal for unity in his party. His appeal was based on the proposition that the party should not tie his hands before he went to negotiate on monetary union, yet tonight the Conservatives tell us that we should do just that and rule out the possibility of monetary union in 1999. Many Conservatives, perhaps the majority, believe that it should be ruled out completely.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Hear, hear.

Mr. Darling: The Euro-scepticism is there for all to see. No wonder the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) looks with distaste at some of those sitting next to him. As he said, if Conservatives wish to exclude themselves not only from Europe but from elsewhere, they are going about it the right way. That is a matter for them.

We believe that it is in the interests of the United Kingdom that we should keep our options open on the single currency. It is essential that there is sustainable convergence among the economies that take part. We need a national debate on the economic tests to be applied. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set them out: jobs, investment, the impact on financial services, the need for flexibility, and the impact on business cycles. Those factors must be considered against the background of the first and foremost question: what is in this country's national interest? Is it in this country's interest to join a single currency or is it not? My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and others have said that it is highly unlikely that Britain will join in the first wave, but to exclude the possibility of joining, which is at the heart of what the Conservative party believes, is not only bad for Britain's interests but is to take a blinkered view of the future.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): Can the Chief Secretary say what studies the Treasury has initiated into the currencies in which our trade is denominated, and how the single currency would affect them?

Mr. Darling: The Treasury and other Departments are engaged in studies of numerous matters, including those mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. When the Government have to come to a view, those discussions will take place in the House and in the country.

Dr. Fox *rose—*

Mr. Darling: No, I have dealt with the point. The hon. Gentleman and most Conservative Members are not interested one jot in such considerations because they have already set themselves against anything to do with Europe and, in particular, with the single currency.

Dr. Fox *rose—*

Mr. Darling: No, I have dealt with that point. The problem for Conservative Members, and the problem that the shadow Chancellor would face if he were elected leader of the Conservative party, is that there is a phalange of Tory Members who have a visceral dislike of everything to do with Europe. That is one of the many reasons that they were rejected by the electorate only a few weeks ago.

I want to deal briefly with the stability and growth pact. It follows that if there is to be a single currency, it is important that it should be underpinned by a pact. One of the pact's objectives is the maintenance of high and stable levels of growth and unemployment. It is committed to stability. Economic stability is one of the Government's primary objectives because only with economic stability can we get the long-term, sustainable growth that Britain needs.

The sanctions under the excessive deficits regulation could not apply to Britain; they can apply only to member states who participate in the single currency. Whether we do that is a matter still to be considered. I want to draw attention to one other regulation because it was mentioned by many people, particularly in the City of London, before the general election: the legal framework for the euro. It is important, whether we join or not, that British institutions, such as the London international financial futures and options exchange, LIFFE, can denominate sterling contracts in euros so that we can maintain London's pre-eminent position not only in Europe but in the world. The broad economic guidelines that are also before the House again emphasise the need for growth and jobs, to which I shall refer shortly.

[Mr. Darling]

New Members who have spoken tonight will come to realise, should they ever participate in a debate on Europe again, that some things never change. Indeed, there were many echoes of the Maastricht debate—some of the speeches seemed exactly the same as those made five years ago.

Mr. Cash: We were right then and we are right now.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is no exception as he is the leader of the reunion of the Euro-sceptics.

I believe that the starting point of any sensible consideration of the issue must be a practical and pragmatic approach to Europe. The question we must ask ourselves about the single currency or any other policy on Europe is what is in the country's national interest. The reason that we co-operate with the rest of Europe and share sovereignty in certain cases is that it is in our interests to do so.

We live in a global economy and it is no longer possible for any country to go it alone economically. Although I appreciate what my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield said tonight, as he has done on many occasions in the past, he must accept surely that as we live in a global economy, co-operation between nations, whether in Europe or anywhere else, must continue and grow. That is extremely important.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: The Foreign Secretary said that if Britain decides to join the first wave the evaluation will take place next spring. If the Government decide not to go ahead, does the Chief Secretary appreciate that business needs to know how long a lead time it will be given to make the necessary investment? Can he undertake that the Government will say what minimum lead time they will give for a positive decision?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is quite right that business and others need time to plan. The Government will carry out an evaluation as to whether the Cabinet will recommend joining the single currency, so our decision will become known at that time. Business will then know its own precise position. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that business is aware of the general discussions taking place, although the Government's view will be made known subsequently.

It is important to co-operate when it is in our interest to do so. It is in our interests that the single market should be expanded and made a reality, for example, in telecommunications and the financial services industry. Britain excels in those sectors by competing on quality and excellence. During our presidency, we intend to push to make that market work.

The social chapter is another example of something that is not just in the interests of those directly affected by it but in the interests of British firms. We must sign up to it because those firms are already affected by it. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary referred to many large firms that deal with the social chapter day in, day out. They want a British Government who are not only committed to the ideal behind the social chapter but argue against proposals that would affect the competitiveness of Europe and those companies in particular. We intend to do that.

The Leader of the Opposition asked some questions about whether qualified majority voting would apply to aspects of the social chapter. As I am sure he is well aware, it does in relation to health and safety, working conditions and information to and consultation with workers, but it does not in terms of social security, trade union rights and other areas. We have always made it clear—before, during and now after the election—that we will do nothing that adversely affects the competitive position of British firms.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made clear today at the ECOFIN meeting, it is important that Europe recognises that, in years to come, competition will not just be between the traditional markets of America, Japan and so on, but with emerging economies that have developed in a way that we could not have imagined in the past few years.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: In a moment.

It is important that Britain and Europe remain competitive against the world. I will do the right hon. and learned Gentleman perhaps a favour as he is clearly out to impress those who sit behind him before they go to the polls tomorrow.

Mr. Howard: Surely the right hon. Gentleman would agree that if the Government sign the social chapter they can argue against measures which would imperil the competitiveness of British business and plead with our partners not to imperil it, but they cannot do anything to stop them because they will be agreed by qualified majority voting. The only way to stop that is not to join the social chapter.

Mr. Darling: I wish the right hon. and learned Gentleman every success tomorrow morning. He must accept, however, that people elected a Government to stick up for British interests, firms and individuals. We intend to do that by signing the social chapter. In other areas, it is clearly not in Britain's interest to entertain qualified majority voting. Those areas are taxation, defence and foreign policy. On issues such as fraud, increasing co-operation is clearly important.

The difference between the Government and the Conservative party, the denuded Opposition, is that the climate of opinion has changed, not just in this country but in Europe. People do not expect a British Government simply to agree with what is proposed in Europe. They are looking for a Government who are prepared to argue their corner and to be genuine partners with others in the European Union. That is why my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary have laid so much weight on re-engaging the European institutions with the people that they are there to serve.

For many people, the sometimes arcane debates about institutions and changes mean absolutely nothing. They want policies that the European Union can facilitate and which will benefit them and provide opportunities for jobs and sustainable economic growth.

We have the opportunity to set out our agenda for growth, not as my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) said, an opportunity to lecture our

European partners; we must show a positive lead and emphasise the importance of employability as well as employment. We must import employability, help flexibility and have an adaptable labour force. Those matters are fundamental because, in a world where capital is increasingly mobile, the skills, training and motivation of the work force here and in Europe will mark us out as a place in which to invest.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: No I will not, because the hon. Gentleman has not been here for most of the evening.

Unlike the defeated Conservative party, we recognise that while the role of Government is different from what it was in the past, we still have the key role of helping to equip individuals and companies for the future. We need to build skills and invest in infrastructure, and we must help small businesses and create the right, stable, economic basis to encourage sustainable long-term growth.

Mr. Blunt: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: I will not, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

The modern market economy is based on knowledge and ideas, technology, creativity and adaptability. Those are what the Government and all modern Governments ought to provide, and it is the job of the European Union to foster the climate for that creation. That is the way to tackle high unemployment in Europe and the obstacles to job creation, and it will encourage employability and therefore employment. Europe must cut unnecessary bureaucracy for small firms and build to completion a single market. It must promote welfare to work opportunities and initiatives, as we are doing.

The people want a Government who are committed to serving their interests not just in Europe but throughout the world in the context of crime prevention, the environment and employment.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Darling: If the hon. Lady does not mind, I will not.

The Conservative party has learned nothing from its defeat. It seems to be increasingly determined to march out into the wilderness. It has nothing to say to the country and it certainly has nothing to say to Europe. That may be a matter of regret to the body politic, but I do not think that it is regretted by many people. By contrast, we are prepared to play a positive role in Europe. We take a practical and pragmatic approach to Europe and its institutions because it is fundamental to re-engage Europe with the people that it is supposed to represent. People must feel the real benefit of being part of the European Union. The Government have already started on that process and we are committed to that in a way that the Conservative party could never be because it is paralysed by its own divisions.

The Government will play a full part in a Europe of employment and opportunity. That is the role which people wanted their Government to play when they elected the new Labour Government on 1 May. They wanted change in Britain and we have already shown how we will deliver that change. People also wanted a change in attitude to Europe. The country believed that the carping and complaining by Conservative Members were selling out the country's interests. They said that they had had enough of that and that they wanted a change.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear, we have already started to make a change. There is a changing attitude in Europe. There are changing opinions in Europe. We intend to build on that and to show the lead for which this country has been crying out for years.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley) (*seated and covered*): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Since we returned following the general election, and the rewiring has been carried out, a number of the Division Bells no longer function. Along the Committee Corridor North, there are now no audible Bells at all, and, unless the televisions are switched to one particular channel, there is no audible sign that a Division is taking place. I am sure that you will be concerned about that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter with me, and I will certainly have it checked out as soon as I leave the Chair.

The House having divided: Ayes 151, Noes 404.

Division No. 21] **[10 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and
Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Sheff'ld Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*

Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and Janet Anderson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 397, Noes 145.

Division No. 22] **[10.18 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Sheffld Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*

Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McKenna, Ms Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark

Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Dr Alan W
(E Carmarthen)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and Janet Anderson.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
(Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin
(Grantham & Stamford)
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bowen Wells and Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. SN 600/97 (C101), consolidated draft Treaty texts; 6946/97, on the strengthening of the surveillance and co-ordination of budgetary policies; 6947/97, on speeding up and clarifying the implementation of the excessive deficit procedure; 10867/96, on the legal framework for the introduction of the euro; 7766/97, on the Commission's recommendation for the broad guidelines of the economic policies of the Member States and the Community; 7767/97, on a progress report on the implementation of the 1996 broad economic policy guidelines; the draft Resolution of the European Council on the stability and growth pact; and the unnumbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 30th May on a draft resolution of the European Council on the establishment of an exchange rate mechanism in the third stage of economic and monetary union; and welcomes the determination of Her Majesty's Government to focus the agenda of the European Union on policies of direct benefit to the peoples of Europe through its initiatives on employment and competitiveness, and to obtain the best deal for Britain at the Amsterdam Summit through constructive negotiations in the Intergovernmental Conference.

Firearms (Compensation Scheme)

10.35 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): I beg to move,

That the draft Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 Compensation Scheme, which was laid before this House on 3rd June, be approved.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. As you will know, the draft scheme was laid before the House last Tuesday. I understand from the Vote Office that the papers were not available until very late on Tuesday night. I have a large number of shooters in my constituency, none of whom has had the chance to let me know what he or she thinks of the measure. I wonder whether you could guide the House as to how long a draft scheme of this nature should be available before it is debated, so that our constituents can make representations to us and we can do our job in this place, rather than having the measure pushed through at short notice.

Madam Speaker: There are no guidelines as to when draft schemes should be published and when they should be debated. However, the hon. Gentleman and his constituents will understand and appreciate that the matter has been debated over a long period of time, not only in the House, but throughout the country.

Mr. Michael: I welcome the opportunity to open the debate on the Government's draft compensation scheme, which has been laid before the House under the terms of section 18 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997.

Perhaps I can help the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) by saying that changes were made to take into account representations from shooters and those in the trade. The fact that the changes were requested by the very people to whom the hon. Gentleman referred demonstrates the lengths to which we have gone in listening to the people involved.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way so early in his speech. Surely that is the point of publishing the Government's proposals. We should have given people at least a fortnight to make representations.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman must realise that there has been a great deal of consultation on the implementation of the scheme, just as there was an enormous amount of debate about the Act. Our priority is to implement the Act as quickly as possible. That requires the compensation scheme to be in place. Meeting the 1 July deadline and giving people three months to hand in their weapons and ancillary equipment requires us to proceed as quickly as possible. There was a general view in the House and among the public that the Act should be implemented as quickly as possible, so that the protection afforded to the public as a result of banning the weapons should be in place without delay.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Is my hon. Friend saying that the schedule to the Act cannot be changed at this stage or afterwards by addition, deletion or amendment?

Mr. Michael: I am not inviting such changes. I am simply stating that right up to the last moment, a great deal of consultation has gone into preparing the schedule and the information in the scheme. That is why the details have been made available. Indeed, I made them available to the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), who will be dealing with these matters for the official Opposition, and to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, to ensure that they had the information as early as possible. We have gone to as much trouble as possible to ensure that the information is available, as well as trying to ensure that the scheme is as fair as possible to all interests concerned.

I had been tempted to say that the matter was not controversial as the Government are implementing a compensation scheme that, in effect, fulfils the promises made by the previous Government during the passage of the 1997 Act.

Compensation will be paid to firearms certificate holders and registered dealers whose high-calibre handguns become prohibited by the 1997 Act. The draft scheme offers fair compensation—and, in at least some cases, generous compensation—for the weapons that will become prohibited and the ancillary equipment used only in connection with those weapons. Subject to parliamentary approval of the scheme, the hand-in period for weapons can begin on 1 July, with appropriate payments starting to be made from that date.

I shall briefly explain how we intend the scheme to operate. Before the hand-in period begins, certificate holders and dealers will receive full details of the final scheme, together with application forms and advice on where and when to surrender their weapons. They must complete the appropriate form in respect of their weapons and equipment and hand it to the police at the time of surrender.

Individuals will have a choice of three options. They may choose to accept a flat rate of £150 for their weapon. Instead, they may choose a standard rate for their weapon from the list of published values at annex A of the scheme. That contains the majority of the most commonly held large-calibre handguns. If they do not wish to accept the flat rate payment and if their gun is either not on the list at annex A, or is markedly different from those on the list, they can choose a third option. That means submitting their claim supported by an independent valuation or other evidence corroborating the value of the items surrendered. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) will realise that the flexibility provided by those three options is considerable.

Similar arrangements will apply to dealers, and they will be able to claim under any of the three options for items that they surrender. However, they will be able to claim under the third option even though their stock may already be listed at annex A. That is because the second option reflects second-hand values, while the other stocks will be either new or second-hand and have a higher retail value. I shall say more about the detail of values in the list in a moment.

The weapons must be handed over to a designated police station, as specified by the chief constable for the force area concerned. Special arrangements will be made with dealers because of the number of weapons that they will have in stock. Similar arrangements will apply to expanding ammunition and ancillary equipment that can be used only in connection with firearms that become prohibited. The corresponding values are set out in

annexes B, C and D of the draft scheme. That is in accordance with the requirements of section 17 of the 1997 Act—and section 16 in respect of expanding ammunition. Although, of course, the equipment will not itself become prohibited, the Government accept that where it cannot be put to any other use, such as for rifles or other legitimate purposes, compensation should be paid.

The claim forms will initially be checked by the police, who will then send them to the firearms compensation section—the FCS, as it is imaginatively named—of the Home Office, where they will be processed as quickly as possible. The FCS has been set up to handle claims for the 160,000 high-calibre handguns that will become prohibited and to deal with the accompanying claims for ancillary equipment. Fifty staff have been recruited and trained, and the target is to deal with all the claims in 18 months.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) *rose—*

Mr. Michael: The majority of straightforward claims under options A and B will of course be dealt with quickly. A computer system has been introduced to ensure that each claim can be dealt with thoroughly, without delay and with the minimum of paperwork.

Mr. Lansley: In respect of options A and B, under which flat payments or payments according to the schedule will be made, there is no reason why compensation should not be paid quickly. Will the Minister give an undertaking that compensation will be paid within 30 days in those cases?

Mr. Michael: I will not tie us to a specific period of days, because we do not know what decisions the House will make on other issues that might affect the speed and volume of the surrenders. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that payments will be made as quickly as possible and, as I suggested shortly after he sought to intervene, the majority of the straightforward claims under options A and B will be dealt with quickly for the reasons that he suggests. However, it would not be sensible to tie the time down to a specific period of days.

Once the claim has been settled and the claimant has no further interest in the guns or equipment, the FCS will issue disposal instructions to the police force storing the weapons and equipment, and those will then be destroyed in accordance with the local force's practice. In a few cases, some weapons or equipment may be retained by police forces for training purposes or may be taken for public display in museums.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): Before the Minister leaves the subject of surrenders at police stations, will he tell us what will happen to the weapons and ammunition that are surrendered? Will they be kept at local police stations or will big depots be created? What will the security arrangements be for those weapons, to prevent large armouries, which would be obvious targets, from being created?

Mr. Michael: The weapons will be destroyed under arrangements made locally. That procedure follows consultation with the police about the best and most secure way to deal with the issue. We have had sensible discussion and agreement on the most secure way to deal with the items.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): On the same point, will the Minister give an assurance that police forces will inform all those who hold firearms certificates of their rights and of the starting date of the scheme before 1 July? Will he also assure the House that police officers in police stations that will receive firearms and equipment will be familiarised with the various documents that will have to be submitted, to save problems occurring after firearms have been surrendered?

Mr. Michael: I assure the hon. Gentleman that much time and thought have been given to those arrangements. As he will be aware, several constraints apply to how we deal with the situation. Decisions first have to be taken by Parliament—that is why we are having a debate about the scheme now—before the police receive the information, to pass it on to the people who will need to surrender weapons. At the same time, we have had to give people an opportunity to make representations about the content of the scheme and to find parliamentary time for the debate.

The police will be allowed only a short time to get ready, but we decided—after consulting widely and discussing the issue with the police—that we should proceed as quickly as possible on the time scale that I suggested. To my knowledge, the police have made considerable efforts to ensure that everybody who will deal with the scheme is fully trained and aware of the arrangements. The time scale is tight, but the police have assured me that they will do all that they can to ensure that everybody is properly informed.

Time will be available after 1 July—not everything has to be done by then—and every effort will be made to ensure that the police have the information they need, if the House agrees the scheme tonight. The police will pass the information on as quickly as possible to shooters so that they can make their applications and hand in their weapons in an orderly manner. I am sure that all the Members who were involved in the earlier debates realise that the House and the public wanted the legislation to be implemented as quickly as possible once the decisions of principle had been taken.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The Minister is dealing well with this sensitive and difficult issue, and the House is grateful to him. Will he tell the House with which representative bodies and trade associations he has discussed the levels of compensation? What response has he received from those organisations about the level of compensation? I ask that because I have an important company in my constituency, which is the largest wholesaler of arms and ammunition in the country.

Mr. Michael: It would take some time to list all the organisations that were consulted. Officials have consulted widely with all the organisations that, over a long time, have expressed interest, including the sporting bodies representing shooters and business interests. There has been detailed discussion.

There are those who are concerned, of course, about the business that they will lose as a result of the scheme's implementation. Indeed, there are those who would wish

[Mr. Michael]

to take compensation further into compensating firms for loss of business. We have made it clear that we shall not go further than what has already been set out. That was the previous Government's position. Compensation is not always made available for loss of business—for example, where pharmaceuticals are removed from general availability. It would be surprising if we were satisfying everyone, especially as there are those who did not want the proposed legislation to become law.

Those who have an interest did not want to see legislation introduced and implemented. At the same time, many of those who were involved in consultations, whether in business or in sport, have sought to find a sensible outcome. That is surely the right approach.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Michael: I shall give way, but perhaps I should make some progress. Hon. Members may wish to make their own speeches.

Mr. Howarth: The Minister said that certain categories of weapon will be held by the police or for training purposes. It seems that other weapons will be placed in museums or elsewhere. I see no reference to those disposals in the scheme. Will the Minister expand on the quantity and category of weapons that he is talking about?

Mr. Michael: I am talking about very small quantities of weapons. That question applies not to compensation but to primary legislation. I understand that the point was taken up by my predecessor. We are dealing now with compensation. We must be concerned, of course, with the disposal of weapons and ancillary equipment, the majority of which will be destroyed under the arrangements that I described.

Once a claim has been settled and the claimant has no further interest in the guns and equipment, the FCS will issue disposal instructions to the police force storing the weapons and equipment, and those will be destroyed in accordance with the local force practice. That will follow discussion with the police about the best way to deal with those issues.

I move on to the detailed values in the scheme. Sections 16 and 17 of the Act make it clear that weapons and ancillary equipment must have been in the claimant's possession on or immediately before 16 October 1996, the date of the previous Government's announcement of their response to Lord Cullen's report.

The draft scheme uses the values of weapons and equipment in the period immediately before that date. The values listed in annexes A, B and D reflect the advertised prices as new in trade journals at that time minus 25 per cent. for normal depreciation. Those are notional prices that we believe individuals might have obtained had they sold their guns or equipment at that time.

As for individuals who submit independent evidence of the retail value of their guns and equipment and claim under option C, the FCS will normally pay out the retail value less 25 per cent. to reflect normal depreciation. For dealers who submit independent evidence of the value of their stock and claim under option C, the FCS will normally pay out the cost price plus 25 per cent., which is a fair reflection of the return that could have been expected had the stock items been sold on.

Officials have had contact with a number of gun dealers, and the dealers' views have been taken into account during the preparation of the draft scheme, as I said. We have used published or advertised values of guns and equipment as they have appeared in trade journals and other sources, rather than the values cited by one or more of the dealers whom we have consulted. That is the best way of obtaining fair values, both for claimants and ultimately for the taxpayer, whose interest also has to be considered.

There will be some concern about the position of dealers, gun clubs and others who will suffer losses as a result of the ban coming into effect. I referred to that concern a few moments ago, in my response to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). That matter was debated at length in the House during the passage of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. It was decided at the time that such losses should not fall within the terms of the Act. The draft scheme therefore enables dealers and others to be compensated only for the weapons and certain ancillary equipment that they hand in. It does not extend to business losses, or to equipment used in the manufacture of prohibited guns or ancillary equipment.

Finally, I must make the position on small-calibre pistols clear. They do not form a part of the draft scheme because they are not prohibited by the Act. The Government intend, however, that there should be a free vote in the House. If the Firearms (Amendment) Bill is passed, that category of handgun will also become prohibited. We shall debate that later this week.

With that expectation, certificate holders and dealers who own small-calibre pistols may hand in those weapons voluntarily to designated police stations at the same time as the other handguns are surrendered. They will have to complete an application form, which will be processed by the FCS, and then they will receive ex gratia payments for those weapons and for related ancillary equipment. Details of those payments are already available in the Library of the House and will be circulated to all claimants at the same time as the details of the compensation scheme. The values of the ex gratia payments have been calculated in exactly the same way as for the main lists—on the basis of the market values in the period immediately prior to last year's statement on 16 October.

If the Firearms (Amendment) Bill is passed, the ex gratia list will become a formal scheme in its own right. That will not be the subject of today's debate, but will be debated during the relevant stages of the Bill.

The arrangements that we have made are a sensible way of ensuring that people who want to hand in their weapons can do so in one fell swoop, rather than having to do it in dribs and drabs; the arrangements are intended as an encouragement, to get as many handguns as possible out of circulation.

The Government believe that the draft scheme is fair and will properly compensate legitimate owners of prohibited weapons and related equipment. I commend it to the House.

10.56 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): We welcome the publication of the compensation scheme for higher-calibre handguns made illegal by the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. I am grateful to the Minister of State for responding to my pleas during the past few days about the differences between the scheme that was originally laid and the scheme before us.

I appreciate the difficulty of drawing up the scheme and the complexity of combing through hundreds of detailed assessments of different weapons and bits and pieces of equipment. It is an area in which it is difficult to be exact.

I do not share the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) that the scheme was not laid for consideration long enough. However, if there had been further consultation with the gun trade initially, it might not have been necessary to withdraw the scheme and re-lay it. That is not a serious criticism of the Government because, as I said, I appreciate the complexity.

The Minister of State will be aware, however, that there is sensitivity among shooters on the issue. When a scheme is laid before Parliament one week and withdrawn the next, there is inevitably suspicion, which I shared until I got the hon. Gentleman's assurances that there was nothing sinister in the withdrawal. I merely flag that up as one of those little points. In dealing with a subject of this nature, it is important to try to get it right first time round—consult all concerned, so that they are not unduly suspicious if a scheme has to be withdrawn suddenly.

The Opposition believe that any compensation scheme must be fair and effectively administered. I am sure that, in drafting the scheme, the Government shared those objectives. Certain questions are left unanswered, however, and I am not certain that the Minister's explanation has fully covered them. I, therefore, seek clarification on a few points.

We introduced the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 to ensure greater protection for the public. As part of that Act, all higher-calibre handguns will be taken out of circulation and destroyed. We seek assurances from the Government that they will ensure that those guns are swiftly destroyed once deposited with the police. Have the Government given serious thought to the time scale between handguns being handed in to police stations and their being destroyed? We do not want handguns lying around in storage for long periods.

The security implications of protecting such armouries from theft would be very great, as, indeed, would be the burden placed on the police, who would no doubt be responsible for keeping them safe. The Minister did not fully answer the question that was put to him on the danger of those weapons lying around too long in police armouries or elsewhere.

I do not seek any information that would identify any locations where the weapons would be kept and could make it easier for terrorists, criminals or anyone else to get their hands on them, but I think that, despite the Minister's assurances that we should not worry because the Government have had intense discussions with the police and are aware that the matter must be dealt with expeditiously and securely, we need more information on how the weapons will be kept, when they will be destroyed and in what circumstances, and whether there will be armouries dotted around the country—with the weapons being passed on to the Army, for example—or one or two grand central armouries.

Mr. Frank Cook: It is refreshing to hear those expressions of concern about such a danger from the right hon. Gentleman, when the same expressions of concern made from the Opposition Benches before the general election were dismissed so easily by the Government of which he was a member.

Mr. Maclean: They were not dismissed so easily; they were not dismissed at all. We were always concerned about the severe security implications when the large number of weapons—160,000 of them—started to come in. It was always our understanding that we would need detailed discussions with the police to ensure that the security arrangements were adequate. We also anticipated that we would have to inform the House what those arrangements would be, and I suspect that we believed that we would have to give a bit more information than the Minister has been able to give tonight.

Of course, I understand that the arrangements may not yet be completed. Different police forces will have different arrangements, but, in due course, if not at the end of tonight's debate, we will need to know more about the security arrangements.

Mr. Michael: I will try to respond to the right hon. Gentleman later in the debate, but I am in a slight difficulty, because he rightly said that he did not want a mass of information that would identify the way in which the items would be dealt with and could cause dangers, but said that he wanted a little more information. I should be grateful if he could explain what additional information he would like. I should certainly be prepared to give him more information discreetly, outside the debate.

Mr. Maclean: We do not need to know addresses, locations and security codes for any of the armouries where the weapons will be stored, but the House and the country need to know whether we anticipate that the weapons will be stored in police armouries in the 43 police forces in England and Wales; whether facilities will be provided by the Ministry of Defence, for example; whether other civilian armouries of a certain security classification can be used instead; how long the Minister would expect the weapons being in the armouries before going to destruction; and what some of the general security arrangements will be, to ensure that it can be clearly certified that all the weapons handed in are destroyed under supervision.

It should be possible for the Government to give that information without revealing anything that would allow terrorists or anyone else to get their hands on those weapons or to breach security.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): In discussing how to dispose of armouries—large numbers of weapons will be involved—will my right hon. Friend join me in suggesting to the Minister that many organisations could help with disposal? Royal Ordnance at Radway Green in my constituency is well placed to do such a job efficiently and quickly. From everyone's point of view, the sooner it is done, the better.

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend makes a valid point to which the Minister may want to respond.

[Mr. Maclean]

I repeat that more than 160,000 higher-calibre handguns will be handed in to police stations when the Act comes into force. The procedure for storing and scrapping them must be slick, efficient and safe. That is no glib request. I recognise, as we always have, that this is a highly complex operation. The police are experts at a host of things that the rest of us could never dream of doing, but this is not an operation which they have done before. I am sure that they will cope wonderfully well, but, in due course, if not tonight, the House will want to know what the slick, efficient arrangements are for keeping the guns safe and ensuring their speedy disposal and destruction.

It is not clear from the scheme how long handgun owners will have to wait before they receive compensation. Gun owners are keen to hear about that. The Minister hoped that it would be 18 months at the most before all the staff were recruited for the firearms compensation scheme and compensation would be paid. I hope that it will be a lot faster than that in the majority of cases, particularly for options A and B, the straightforward schemes.

I will not at present join my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) in pressing for a 30-day deadline, but I do not see why it should not be as close to that as possible. The Minister, understandably, may not want to fix a deadline at this stage. The staff are not in post and have not been trained; it is difficult to see how things will pan out. However, to say, "Don't worry, everyone will be paid in 18 months," is not much of an assurance. I accept that, in complicated cases, if someone has a rare or speciality firearm that needs to be valued, or if someone comes in at the end of scheme, or if there is a dispute, it could take up to 18 months. For the majority of standard and flat-rate cases, I see no reason why compensation should not be paid rapidly, and close to the 30-day period suggested by my hon. Friend.

The Firearms (Amendment) Act created an exemption for trophies of war. Some handguns are of sufficient historical significance to justify increased market value, but fall outside the exemptions made for trophies of war and antique handguns. Let us say—I wish it were the case, but, unfortunately, it is not—that I owned a handgun that had been owned by a Lord Montgomery or a General de la Billière. In other respects, it might be a standard military issue weapon such as a 9 mm Browning with nothing else special about it. Such ownership alone would be enough to increase its market value significantly without adaptations, improvements or bells and whistles.

It is not clear from the scheme where I would stand with regard to compensation. Would I come under option B or C? If I were to be compensated under the former, I would receive a sum well below the weapon's market value. There will not be many such cases, but such exceptions can be very unfair to the individuals concerned. We have tried to devise a scheme that is as fair as possible to everyone. I should be grateful if the Minister could cast light on such cases. The Government should also say whether they regard deactivated handguns as legitimate and whether their owners would receive compensation under the scheme.

Finally, I remind the House of the provisions of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, which has given Britain gun controls which are among the toughest in the world. We introduced the Act to protect the public and, as it is currently framed, I believe that it will achieve that objective. It removes all handguns from general circulation and bans all guns from being kept in the home.

The Government have now proposed that the ban on higher-calibre handguns should be extended to lower-calibre .22 handguns. We believe that that is not only petty and vindictive, but unnecessary. It would kill the long-established Olympic sport of target shooting which is practised by thousands of law-abiding citizens and at which this country does very well. We have been better at that than at cricket for many years. It would impose a heavy burden of further compensation bills on the taxpayer. It is also possible that extending the ban could reduce public safety by driving some target shooters underground.

The 1997 Act places strict controls on the ownership of .22 handguns, which protect the public and ensure that law-abiding citizens can still enjoy their Olympic sport. Under the Act, .22 handguns can only be stored at registered gun clubs that meet the toughest of security criteria. It is also a criminal offence under the Act to take a .22 handgun out of a licensed club without a police permit. They would be allowed out of a gun club only for repair or if their owner is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. I am reluctant to interrupt the right hon. Gentleman, but we are talking about compensation and not about the movement of handguns.

Mr. Maclean: You are absolutely right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I intended to conclude on compensation, but I thought it right to allude to the Government's proposals to extend the ban on handguns. That will involve massive amounts of extra compensation—much more than the bill that we are currently facing for higher-calibre handguns. On Wednesday, we will discover whether the Government have given any thought to the finance that will be required to compensate owners should the Government go ahead with a complete ban on all handguns.

We welcome the compensation scheme that has been announced by the Government, but I await the Minister's clarifying responses to the points I have raised. I hope that the scheme will ensure an effective and fair compensation settlement for all the owners of higher-calibre handguns.

11.11 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I want to make a positive and constructive contribution. That was why I asked my hon. Friend the Minister of State whether the schedule to the Act could be changed now either by addition, deletion or amendment. I noted very carefully that he responded, "I am not inviting changes."

Consultations may have taken place until recently, but mine finished at about 8 o'clock tonight. A number of aspects of the compensation scheme still cause considerable concern not only to individual shooters but to dealers in the trade. I should like to refer to one or two of them.

The Minister has already said that a large number of guns in common usage are not listed. He has outlined the proposals to take care of those exceptions. No reference, however, has been made to a number of common factors. For example, between publication of the first draft of the

compensation scheme and the third, which was issued on Thursday, all mention of .38 round-nosed lead ammunition has been removed. That constitutes a large proportion of the ammunition that is used in .38 calibre handguns. That means that dealers with large stocks might not get compensation.

Unofficially, and under the blanket, the dealers association has been led to believe that although dealers might not get compensation for the .38 round-nosed lead ammunition as ammunition, they might be able to claim it on the basis of components. That means that they could claim for the content of the casing, the casing itself, the primer and the bullet. I notice that they will not be able to disassemble the munitions, but will have to hand it over as finite rounds. That is because it is illegal to unmake munitions. The only way to get rid of them legally is to fire the damned things.

The irony is that if the advice given under the blanket by the Home Office to the dealers is correct, it will mean that instead of £120 per 1,000 rounds made up, the dealers will get £167 per 1,000 rounds for components that could still be made up anyway. I do not suggest for a moment that if that is true the Minister should block it, because the dealers will lose a major part of their income and will have cash flow problems. It seems that they will have to wait until individual shooters are dealt with before they are able to claim for their losses. It is an anomaly, and it shows that the consultation that the Minister has reported to the House is less than full. He may be satisfied with it, but the trade is not.

The shadow Minister, the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) repeated the oft-made claim that 160,000 of these pistols and revolvers will need to be handed in. That figure was arrived at by the police by counting the weapons that are registered on firearms certificates. It takes no account of the weapons that are held in custody by licensed dealers who keep a record of weapons in a register and not on a certificate. Each dealer has a summary certificate and the trade estimates that between 75,000 and 80,000 weapons have not been taken into account by the Government. That means that the Government are more than 50 per cent. out on their figures so far.

Has any account been taken of health and safety regulations in connection with the handing in of weapons at police stations? Those regulations require any premises taking receipt of such commodities to be licensed as a magazine, and they also require the issue of a recipient competent authority document to each person surrendering powders, primers or mixed explosives. Those documents have to be individually signed and supplied to each person surrendering on each occasion.

Does the Minister understand the administrative and bureaucratic burden that he will place on our police service? Will we be able to conduct this exercise, not with 160,000 weapons and their accoutrements but with about 220,000 weapons—nearly quarter of a million—in the space of three months? Is that realistic? Jack the Lad will have a field day in the back streets, getting away with whatever he wants to do, because the police will be bogged down in a morass of paperwork and nonsense.

As has been said about .38 ammunition, 9 mm full metal jacket and total metal jacket ammunition is useless without handguns, and it accounts for about 40 per cent. of the ammunition that is already stocked. What is to happen to it? There is no mention of compensation in the draft scheme. Is compensation to be paid to dealers? Individual shooters will get compensation for the few rounds that they might have—a couple of hundred rounds here and there—but we are talking about many tens of thousands of rounds. Are the dealers to be compensated for them? It is not mentioned in the draft.

I see that several other hon. Members want to speak, so I shall ask one final question. Who is going to pay compensation to Manchester and the north-west of England? That may seem a strange question to pose at this stage, but let me explain my reasons for asking it. In 2002, the Commonwealth games are due to arrive in the north-west. If run successfully, they will be the source of great income and an economic surge for the country as a whole, the north-west in particular and Manchester especially.

Two of the principal disciplines in shooting in the Commonwealth games are the .32, which has already been banished, and the .22. If this legislation passes, we will have no one in 2002 to run those disciplines: we will not have qualified judges or referees and we will, therefore, not be able to mount those disciplines in the Commonwealth games. One of the requirements of the Commonwealth games coming to Manchester was that the full range of shooting disciplines be part of the broad competition. If we make it illegal, we shall not only render our own competitors unable to participate but put the country in grave danger of losing the Commonwealth games that we have already secured for 2002 and wiping out any prospect of getting an Olympic games in the future.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): We will have a Conservative Government by then.

Mr. Cook: I did not come here this evening to listen to third-rate comics from the back of the Gallery.

Jim Fox won the gold medal for the pentathlon, returned to the capital a hero and was fêted. If we pass this legislation, the youngsters of tomorrow will have no opportunity to emulate him, because we will have banned all our young people from participating in the pentathlon at any time in the future. I repeat what I have said many times in the House: the Bill is unnecessary, it is irrational, it is unenforceable and I am frankly surprised that we should be pressing it with the same indecent haste that the Tory regime showed in respect of higher-calibre weapons.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, I emphasise that this debate is about compensation, which is a very narrow subject.

11.23 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): I shall certainly take your advice to heart, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because although the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 which has led to this draft compensation scheme was not one of the finer pieces of legislation passed by the House, we will have the opportunity to rerun some of the arguments advanced against it on Wednesday, when we consider the next Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

The draft Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 compensation scheme raises almost as many questions as it answers. My first question, of which someone on the Treasury Bench might like to take note so that the Minister can answer it when he makes his winding-up speech, concerns the draft compensation scheme that was laid before Parliament on 25 May and then withdrawn. What changes have been made in the scheme since then? Why was it necessary to withdraw it? Was it just badly spelt, written or drafted, or were specific changes made in the compensation terms, which made it necessary for it to be redrafted and relaid before Parliament?

My second question concerns the scope of the scheme, which is set out on page 2 of the draft compensation document. Paragraph 4 states that the scheme

"does not deal with small-calibre pistols or ancillary equipment for such pistols."

I believe that, at the moment, under the provisions of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, ex gratia payments are available to those who voluntarily choose to surrender small-calibre pistols. It would make much more sense if a proper compensation scheme for small-calibre pistols were included at this stage, because people who own such pistols may want to surrender them. They may receive compensation that is not nearly as fair as it might be in a later scheme.

If the Firearms (Amendment) Bill that we shall debate on Wednesday is eventually enacted, we shall be re-running all these arguments in a few months' time and drawing up a further draft Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 compensation scheme for small-calibre pistols. Surely the time to agree a proper scheme for small-calibre pistols is now.

Mr. Michael: Several contributions tempt immediate responses, but this one especially. It is proposed that we give ex gratia payments so that shooters who use high-calibre and low-calibre weapons can hand in their weapons in one fell swoop and we can get the weapons out of the way. Many shooters now think, "Let us get it over and done with; let us know where we stand." The lines of the ex gratia scheme will follow the lines of the compensation scheme that is being debated tonight as a measure consequent on the 1997 Act.

Mr. Colvin: I am grateful to the Minister for responding then—it will enable him to cut short his winding-up speech—but he has already run through the options for compensation for large-calibre handguns, setting out the details of the three different options. Is he now saying that the ex gratia payments that will be available to small-calibre pistol owners who choose to surrender them will be based on the three options that are set out in the draft document? If so, I have a further question regarding option C, which is for

"a payment based on an individual valuation of an item's full market value as at or immediately before 16 October 1996".

Will that valuation be firm, or will arbitration be permitted if the owner of the firearm is not satisfied with the decision that has been taken on its value?

The Minister's intervention raises another issue—the total cost of the scheme. Interestingly, the draft, which is the result of many discussions since the original estimate was made when the Bill went to the other place on 5 December 1996, introduces a figure of £150 million as the total cost of compensation mooted under the scheme. In my submission, that estimate is based on very shaky ground.

I appreciate that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already been obliged to postpone his Budget, which was initially proposed for tomorrow, because of the gaping black hole in his finances and the fact that he is about £10,000 million short and the money must come from somewhere—he does not know where. Several measures that have come before the House in the past couple of weeks have shown that there are serious deficiencies in the funding arrangements that the Government propose for some of the measures that they are introducing.

Mr. Michael: If the hon. Gentleman wants to make a serious contribution to this debate about compensation, he might bear in mind the thought that the need to pay compensation is our inheritance from the previous Government, as is any black hole anywhere in the economy.

Mr. Colvin: I am not going to be tempted down that path, but the black hole exists because there is a gaping difference between the promises made by the Labour party during the general election campaign and its inheritance from the previous Government in terms of spending commitments that it has already said it will honour.

The question of the cost of the scheme is, however, very relevant. The scheme will clock up still further sums which will have to be found somewhere. It should be borne in mind that the base figure of 160,000 large-calibre pistols that will be surrendered is a Home Office estimate. I do not think that the House, which is now agreeing the terms of the scheme, has any means of assessing how accurate that figure is, and therefore I do not see any way in which we can agree that the total cost of compensation under the scheme will be the round figure of £150 million.

There is a further point that is worth making about cost which relates to the Bill that we shall discuss on Thursday. It concerns small-calibre pistols. According to a figure published by the Home Office, 40,000 such pistols will have to be surrendered. The Minister has said that ex gratia payments will be—or could be—made under the scheme, and that that cost will have to be taken into account and added to the £150 million that we believe it may already cost. How has he arrived at the number of 40,000 small-calibre pistols, and has he any idea what the additional cost of all that will be? There is an estimate of £12 million in the Bill that we are to discuss on Wednesday; once more, I suggest that that figure is hopelessly inadequate.

Paragraph 7 of the scheme gives the impression that the police will be able to lay down where and when the shooter must surrender his or her gun. The Act requires surrender at a designated place within the three-month period, but not at a specified time. The Home Office guidance to police is likely to be that the date of surrender will be by negotiation, but that should be made clear this evening; if it is not, a major question mark will remain over that aspect of surrender.

The Act says that someone who retains a prohibited gun after three months commits an offence. What happens if a person tries to surrender his or her weapon, but is

frustrated by the police? Surely the difficulty would be made still worse if some constabularies did not have adequate surrendering points. I would welcome further information from the Minister.

I was pleased that the Minister raised a question that I asked at Home Office questions this afternoon—on compensation for pistol clubs, apart from compensation for the value of their firearms, ammunition and ancillary equipment. A serious case can be made for compensation for the loss of their premises, business and fee income, and for all the other financial costs on top of the loss of their weapons.

I have not seen the official record, but I believe that, in replying to my question this afternoon, the Minister said that, of the 1,440 shooting clubs in England and Wales, only 49 were exclusively pistol—that is 4 per cent. of the total. I think that, by implication, the Minister was saying, "That is not very important; many of these clubs may be able to convert to rifle shooting, and may therefore be able to survive." The fact is, however, that if one club is forced out of business by the Government, that is unfair enough and should be dealt with as a problem; if 49 have to go out of business, with all their membership, the Minister should take the matter seriously, rather than brushing it to one side in the cavalier manner with which he approached my question this afternoon.

11.34 pm

Mr. Thomas Graham (West Renfrewshire): I support the Government, although I believe that they have been over-generous. Some of us might have argued that the compensation should be reduced, but I shall support the Government tonight because it is a move in the right direction.

I listened to the comments of the hon. Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) on compensation. I remember the debates in the House about the BSE disaster, which cost the country billions of pounds. Conservative Members rushed to support the farmers, as did I, to see that farmers received adequate compensation for the savage and tragic problems suffered by their industry. However, I did not hear many Conservative Members arguing for compensation for the workers in meat and leather factories, who survived only because they worked in the meat industry. They have lost their jobs, but they have received no compensation apart from redundancy pay. That was tragic, and the Tory Government were wrong not to compensate the workers who lost their jobs.

I will support the Tory—the Government action to give compensation *[Interruption.]* Sometimes the House gets like the playhouse—the comedy. It is not a comic show when one considers those in the meat industry who lost their job through no fault of their own. The Tory Government could have taken action a long time ago on mad cow disease. It finally affected the previous Government and was one of the reasons why they were rejected by such large numbers at the general election.

On a more serious note, I will support the Government with great reluctance, as I believe that £150 is far too much compensation for surrendering a weapon. Conservative Members suggested tonight that the measure would drive some shooters underground. Those folk should never have had a licence if they were prepared to break the law. We changed the law in the House of Commons and it is a serious matter to suggest that folk might go underground. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will punish them as hard as he can. As a Scotsman, I remember the Dunblane disaster, which forced the measure on us tonight.

11.36 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I shall be brief, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you have made me aware that several hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate.

I shall raise two points. The first is on the issue of security, which I raised in an earlier intervention. It is true that, as the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said, when we as a Government were asked about that issue, we said that due measures would be taken. That was reasonable then, when the scheme had yet to be worked out in detail.

Now that the scheme has been worked out in detail, it is reasonable to ask for a little more than the rather bland assurances that we were given. It is reasonable also to ask that a little more assurance is given openly in the House, although I understand well enough that an offer was made to give rather more information to my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) outside the Chamber. Some more assurances need to be given in the House tonight.

Secondly, I would not dream of detaining the House by discussing the merits of a proposal that has yet to come before it, but it is inconceivable that the very existence of that proposal will not have an impact on the compensation scheme.

We had already agreed—the present Government are following in our footsteps—that if people were surrendering their .22s as a result of the restrictions that we had introduced, they would receive ex gratia payments, even though we were not strictly at that time obliged to pay, because we had not proposed to ban .22s. Indeed, I hope that the Government will yet see sense.

It is extremely likely that more people will wish to surrender their .22s in anticipation of the ban. It must also surely be the case that more clubs will close sooner, because they will not wish to upgrade their security in the knowledge that the sport will not continue. The proposals that have yet to come before us must therefore impact on the scheme in terms of not only the total value of compensation paid—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) referred—but the administrative load placed on the police and other authorities by people seeking compensation. Has the Minister gauged the impact of his proposals on the scheme in terms of both amounts and additional administrative burdens? Those are important points, and I ask the hon. Gentleman either to address them when he responds to the debate or to write to me subsequently.

11.39 pm

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): The view of the Liberal Democrats, even with our new high-calibre post-election format, remains as it was during the passage of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill earlier this year. We believe that the compensation scheme is okay as far as it goes. The issue is not what anyone might think about the guns themselves, but fairness and justice—concepts to which the Labour party refers constantly.

[Mr. Richard Allan]

Two areas of compensation must be addressed, and the Minister has not convinced me that that has been done satisfactorily. The first concerns debts incurred by clubs and associations—people who quite properly and innocently took on debts to establish gun clubs several years ago and who, in a few months, may be bankrupt or seriously out of pocket through no fault of their own. The legislation should not leave people with unreasonable liabilities because of Government action.

The second issue involves compensating the gun dealers, who will remain in business after the legislation is passed and the scheme is introduced, for their reduced turnover. We have suggested reasonably that the payment of a year's profit in the affected areas of their business would compensate them for any loss of business. We believe that both the changes would be fair and just and, whatever the decision tonight, we urge the Government to consider them now before gun clubs, associations and businesses face ruinous financial consequences as a result of arbitrary Government legislation.

11.41 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I have several questions to which I seek replies from the Minister. The compensation scheme derives directly from the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. Those who opposed that legislation were told during its passage that the people who would lose their weapons would continue to be able to pursue their sport because they would be compensated for the loss of their high calibre weapons and could use the money to transfer to weapons of .22 calibre and below. That compensation may be fair for people who could make that change, but it is not fair for those who are being denied the main sporting pursuit of their lives. We must remember that many shooters are devoted to their sport.

We must also consider additional legislation that will affect compensation for high calibre weapons—particularly compensation to gun dealers. Dealers could argue that they would have been compensated for the loss of their high-calibre weapons and would then have sold many smaller-calibre weapons. We must ensure that we compensate properly those gun dealers who will be badly affected by the Government's follow-on legislation. I hope that the Minister is taking careful note of these points.

I challenged the Minister earlier to reveal Labour's position regarding rifles and shotguns. Will Labour salami-slice until it has done away with all shooting? If the Government decree that a type of handgun is too dangerous to own because it may lead to the sort of massacre that occurred in Dunblane, it is logical to assume that they will ban rifles and shotguns also. We cannot expect the owners of rifle ranges to alter their business operations now if there is a chance that the Government might do something different 12 months later. They need to know now about any new proposals. We want some assurances from the Minister that the Labour party will not take action on that.

11.44 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I hope that the Minister took careful note of the speech made by the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), because he articulated many of my concerns and those of my constituents and many others throughout the country. It is important to bear in mind the fact that the compensation scheme arises from a most draconian Act, which hit at law-abiding people, depriving them of their sport and almost rendering them criminal—indeed, the hon. Member for West Renfrewshire (Mr. Graham) almost suggested that they were. The Act does nothing to deal with people who hold weapons illegally.

We shall deal with the principle of banning weapons another time. In the meantime, we have to deal with the legislation that is already on the statute book. It has been passed by Parliament, but those who supported it must accept that due compensation should be paid to those who have been engaged in a lawful activity that Parliament has now suddenly rendered unlawful. That is the minimum that those people can expect.

We shall find that the bill is very large. My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) said that the current figures may well be an underestimate of the amount that will have to be paid out. How much discussion will there be on the figures in the annexes? I have not had an opportunity to see the annexes or to discuss the issue with my constituents before tonight. It would be only fair to consider further whether the figures there represent adequate compensation for depriving people of a lawful activity.

Has the Minister addressed the valuation date of 16 October? Many people in the shooting fraternity believe that that was not a reasonable date to use to arrive at a fair market value. A fair market value should properly be based on a date before the Dunblane tragedy. I should like the Minister to address that.

The Minister was kind enough to give way earlier when I raised the question of weapons that may be held by the police and others which may be placed in museums. He suggested that the issue was dealt with in the Act. I have had a quick look through the Act and I cannot find the information. The issue may be of concern to people who hold historic weapons that they are going to hand in. If they see them on display at their local museum without having been told anything, they may feel offended. The Minister should address that. I should be grateful if he could be more specific.

11.47 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I should declare an interest first, because I am a consultant to the British Field Sports Society. However, handguns play no significant part in any country activity, except for the humane destruction of livestock.

I should like the Minister to expand on the issues put to him by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) about what will happen to gun clubs that will no doubt be destroyed by the Bill that we shall consider within 48 hours. There is a sense of unreality about tonight's debate, because we know perfectly well that, on Wednesday, with their large majority, the Government will force through their measure to ban all handguns, leaving many gun clubs exposed to serious financial loss.

The hon. Member for Hallam asked what would happen if a member of a club had taken bank loans or mortgages to provide facilities for the club. What would happen to the equipment that the club had bought? Annex C lists the equipment that will be compensated for at the moment,

but if the next stage of this sad progress goes through, the costs of equipment will be much greater. An automatic target changer can cost between £800 and £900. A club that can exist under the previous Government's proposals, by being able to use .22s, can still survive, but when further legislation is introduced it will go out of existence. The National Small-bore Rifle Association club, for example, has 10 target changers which represent a considerable sum. We need some clarification about the Minister's thinking on compensation for such people.

Two other points have not been touched on tonight. The first is appeals. It is a moot point whether a weapon has been customised or raised above the level of the standard for sale weapon. Who will determine that? Under the scheme, the chief constable can appoint an outside assessor, but the choice of outside assessor will be solely at the discretion of the chief constable. Can the person who wishes to appeal bring in his own expert? That is a significant point.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) spoke about trophies of war. One can imagine an enormous debate about the value of a weapon that may be a trophy of war. It is wrong that the chief constable should have sole discretion to appoint an expert to determine the value of a weapon. What appeal would there be against the original valuation?

Mr. Colvin: There is a good example of what my hon. Friend refers to quite close to hand. The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) and I took possession, on behalf of the House, of two presentation pistols at Bisley following the annual shoot against their lordships. Those pistols are in the possession of the House and they are now collectors' pieces. Under the present compensation arrangements, they will get the ordinary market value while their real value in the market at large is very much higher.

Mr. Atkinson: I agree. My hon. Friend illustrates well the problems to which I am alluding and which the Minister will, I hope, deal with in his winding-up speech.

I shall make just one further point, because we want the Minister to have an opportunity to respond fully to our questions. What compensation will there be for electronic security devices? Under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, gun clubs had responsibility to enhance their security, which meant not just gun safes, which are mentioned in the compensation scheme, but a lot of complex electronic equipment, some of which has already been installed. Once again, clubs whose future now looks extremely uncertain because of the debate we shall have in less than 48 hours' time face substantial bills for electronic security and surveillance equipment which will be of no value if the next stage of legislation goes through.

11.52 pm

Mr. Michael: I have taken careful note of the variety of concerns that have been expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I assure them that where time prevents me from responding fully, I shall write to them. Many questions were very general and some hon. Members questioned the Act rather than the compensation scheme. There were a number of short questions that would require a long answer. That would be not only unpopular, but impossible within the time available.

There were, for example, concerns about the date of base values. Any date is arbitrary to some extent, but we believe that the October date for the basic valuation is fair and reasonable because it is the date when the previous Government took the decision to legislate.

I listened to the pleas of several hon. Members who asked for compensation for business, including a specific suggestion, which included what could be a large figure, from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan). That would involve finding extra money over and above what the previous Government allowed for in the Act. We would also be setting a precedent in compensating for loss of business and that would not be right.

Hon. Members referred to a number of wider issues that fall outside the scope of the scheme. The voluntary surrender of .22 weapons is a practical proposition, as I made clear in my opening remarks. It is only sensible to make it possible for people to hand in .22 weapons and be compensated for them, as well as any larger-calibre weapons, in order to meet the objective of getting as many handguns as possible out of circulation. That is what the scheme is all about.

The merit of implementing the scheme as quickly as possible and giving the new Bill a Second Reading without delay is that before people hand in guns voluntarily, consequent on the decisions that we are taking tonight, they will know the intention and the will of the House of Commons following the general election. By 1 July, when the Act comes into force, they will have had time to consider its implications.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) referred to the impact of the new legislation on the police as further weapons will have to be handed in. We have tried to spread the load through the voluntary scheme so that we do not suddenly switch to the handing in of .22 weapons when the new Bill is passed by both Houses.

The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) talked about our forcing through a vote to ban .22 weapons because of the Government's vast majority. I am always glad to refer to our large majority, but it seems to have escaped the hon. Gentleman's notice that we have promised a free vote on the issue. I believe that the vast majority of my right hon. and hon. Friends will support our proposals, as they share the public's belief that a complete ban on handguns is right. That belief will determine the decisions later this week.

Today, we are dealing only with compensation under the existing Act, but making clear the arrangements that we are putting in place for expediting the voluntary surrender of lower calibre weapons.

It is clear that my hon. Friend the Member for West Renfrewshire (Mr. Graham) spoke for the silent majority in the House and elsewhere. Like the previous Government, we are in the business of getting rid of dangerous weapons. That is why we have produced a compensation scheme that meets the commitments that they made during the passage of the 1997 Act. We want to be fair to those who are losing the opportunity to take part in a sport that they have engaged in quite legitimately up to now, but we have no intention of going beyond providing the compensation for guns and ancillary equipment that was promised at the time.

I, too, dismiss the idea that shooters will go underground. I was surprised that the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) should raise

[Mr. Michael]

such an issue. Time and again, it has been stressed that those taking part in shooting are law-abiding citizens. In that case, they will not go underground; they will obey the law. We need to ensure that the law is clear and reflects the will of the public and the House, and that we are as fair as is reasonable in compensating people for the value of their weapons and ancillary equipment. That is why we are introducing the scheme which will provide reasonable, if not generous, compensation.

Like the right hon. Member for Penrith and The Border, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald wanted more information about the disposal of weapons. There is no secret about the general storage of weapons. Arrangements are simply best left to local police discretion. Some forces will store weapons at several locations in force areas—some forces cover a much bigger area than others—others are making facilities available under central force arrangements. Security is paramount in police planning. We discussed the issue with the police in advance of presenting the arrangements. We discussed, for example, the option of centralised arrangements rather than disposal on a more local basis. After listening to advice from the police, the general view was that it was greatly preferable and more secure to deal with disposal on a local basis.

It is impossible to say how long weapons will be stored—another question that was raised—because that will depend on how quickly the claims can be processed. Weapons and equipment can be disposed of only when the claims have been dealt with. I can, however, assure the House that the weapons will be destroyed as soon as is practicable.

There were suggestions that immense difficulties will be created for the police and that they have no precedent for such an exercise. In the 1996 amnesty, 23,000 guns were disposed of; in 1988, 48,000 guns were stored and then destroyed by the police service. To answer another question, there is no compensation for deactivated weapons, which are not covered by the Act and will not therefore be surrendered.

There was a reference to weapons that have some special value as a result of, for instance, being owned by General Sir Peter de la Billière. Presumably they would be of additional value if he had owned them when he served as general officer commanding in Wales. There are arrangements for such weapons in the proposals. The weapons would fall under option C, under which individuals can come forward with specific valuations. They could seek exemption from prohibition under section 7 of the Act concerning firearms of historic interest if the interest in them was considerable enough to justify such exemption.

The hon. Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin), who wanted to spend an awful lot of public money, seemed to want to limit the police's power to lay down details of the arrangements for when people can hand in weapons. Making such arrangements will of course take police time and it is sensible and logical for the police to make them in relation to time and place, and for the people who are to hand in weapons to be notified. The exercise cannot simply be carried out on a total open door basis. That is especially true of rural areas, where distance as well as security may be of particular significance.

The hon. Member for Romsey asked some questions about the estimates and figures that have been bandied around. The original 200,000 estimate was based on returns from a survey of all police forces conducted in the summer of 1996. Subsequently, a sample of a limited number of forces was undertaken to identify the total. About 40,000 of those identified were small-calibre pistols.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) made a powerful speech. I understand his passion on the issue and that he is opposed to the Act altogether. We are discussing not the Act but levels of compensation. He talked about disassembling ammunition. At the beginning of the debate, I referred to the arrangements that we propose that will apply to expanding ammunition and ancillary equipment that can be used only in connection with firearms that become prohibited.

My hon. Friend referred to the possibility of claiming for components of expanding ammunition. That is not part of our proposal. That was a suggestion from the gun trade which the Home Office undertook to consider. It was not advice that the Home Office gave to the trade. My hon. Friend based his remarks on a misunderstanding of the consultation that has taken place.

We have tried to be open and clear about how we want to deal with the issues. There will be an impact on those who have legitimately taken part in a sport that will now be banned. That will affect the Commonwealth games and the bid for the Olympics, but the Secretary of State has power, under the existing firearms laws, to give special authority to allow competitions to take place involving prohibited weapons. That dispensation can be used for Commonwealth and Olympic pistol-shooting competitions. British participation in such competitions is, however, unlikely to continue, because of the impact of the bans. That is sad for those who have taken part and wish to continue to take part in those sports, but that is part of the price that has to be paid for determining that the protection of the public must come first.

The business before us tonight is agreeing to make reasonable compensation to those who will no longer be able to use—

It being one and half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents).*

Question agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 Compensation Scheme, which was laid before this House on 3rd June, be approved.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Jane Kennedy.]*

12.5 am

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): I am especially happy, so close to the Budget, to raise one or two issues about the Government's finances, which were—oddly enough—touched on in the debate on handguns. An Opposition Member pointed out that there is a black hole, as it has become known, in Government finances. We did not hear an apology from any Opposition Member for leaving us that happy legacy, but the Government face several major problems in clearing up the mess that we inherited.

We saw a tremendous burst of enthusiasm and publicity for the decision to set the Bank of England free to set interest rates. Much play was made of the fact that, in the days immediately following the decision, long-term interest rates declined. On 6 May, when the Chancellor made his announcement, long-term interest rates—by which I mean United Kingdom 10-year Government bonds—were running at 7.1 per cent. By the end of that week, they had declined to 6.95 per cent. and everybody welcomed that. It was not mentioned that by 29 May and throughout that week the rate had crept up by 0.5 per cent., which more than compensated for the initial decline.

The rate increased by 0.25 per cent. over the rate before we gave the Bank of England freedom to set interest rates. That shows that the international money markets do not judge the management of the British state's finances and our economic health by whether the Chancellor or a Central Intelligence Agency agent—I understand that such a person is one of our new appointments—makes the decision on interest rates. I did not notice in Labour's manifesto a promise to appoint former CIA agents to determine Britain's interest rates, but we all live and learn. However, that is not the issue.

What determines long-term interest rates is the assessment that the money markets make about the long-term health of the British economy. On the key indices, for all the flim-flam and nonsense during the election campaign, we have serious problems. When the money markets set long-term interest rates, they assess the balance between savings and consumption in the British economy. Part of the problem for our economy is that we have saved far too little for decades—the problem was accelerated during the Thatcher regime when tax cuts led to a further structural imbalance in public finances—and we have invested far too little. That problem was exacerbated under the previous Government.

I was struck by the then Chancellor's performance during the run-up to the election and by his constant emphasis on the golden rule. That is the idea that over an economic cycle we should not borrow. We might borrow during the downswing, but the borrowing must be repaid during the upswing. If we apply that golden rule now, we should have repaid Government debt in each of the past three years. We should see a reduction in the public sector borrowing requirement and in total Government debt. Instead, it has crept up from about 25 per cent. of gross domestic product, when the previous Prime Minister took office in 1990, nearly to the 60 per cent. limit that will cause problems with the Maastricht criteria. I do not believe that Governments can borrow their way out of recessions.

I expect to see the Government carry out the commitment to the golden rule, which means that we should not continue borrowing this year. There should be substantial tax increases so that we do not continue to pile up the burden of debt. At this stage in the cycle, we should have been repaying for about two to three years.

There has recently been a rather bizarre green budget from Goldman Sachs and the Institute of Fiscal Studies. There has been talk in glowing terms of Government debt reducing to about zero by the turn of the century. That, however, is wildly optimistic. So many of the assumptions in that green budget are optimistic. I hope sincerely that no one on the Government Front Bench will pay much attention to the predictions that are contained within it.

It is true that the level of Government spending has reduced—we might assume that it will reduce dramatically over the next few months given a dramatic increase in tax revenues coming to the Government as more is spent in the consumer boom that is building up—but dis-saving in the corporate sector has more than matched that improvement in Government finances.

I know that "dis-saving" is a ghastly term, meaning the reverse of saving, but let us consider the second quarter of 1996. As a proportion of gross domestic product, the dis-saving by Government was 4 per cent. By the fourth quarter of that year, only six months later, it had fallen to 1.3 per cent. Goldman Sachs and the Institute of Fiscal Studies, for example, were saying, "This is a dramatic 2.7 per cent. improvement." But that was more than matched by a worsening in the corporate sector of 2.9 per cent. Company savings over that period dramatically declined.

Once again, we are seeing a reduction in savings and an increase in consumption. It is like pressing one side of a mattress and seeing the other side rise. Until we tackle the underlying imbalance in the economy, an impact on reducing Government debt could be wiped out by a reverse effect in the corporate sector or even in personal savings.

The green budget is quite glowing about our prospects, but, in reality, total savings within the economy, as a proportion of GDP, declined from 16.4 to 16.1 per cent. How does that relate to investment? If we cannot increase the level of savings, we cannot increase the level of investment. It is especially significant and disturbing that the level of investment in the economy as a proportion of GDP is lower than it was during Mrs. Thatcher's first recession. That is stunning. In the midst of that devastating recession, the then Government presided over a higher level of investment than was achieved after five years of sustained growth in the economy.

The long-term implications are devastating. If we make a simple comparison between ourselves and Germany, we should be aware that the latest figure for the UK for the first quarter of this year is 15.2 per cent. of GDP savings while in Germany, for the last quarter of last year—the latest figure that is available—the proportion is 21 per cent. Until we close that gap, we shall continue to decline in relation to the strength of the German economy. Any question of being able to join monetary union or even re-enter the exchange rate mechanism would be extremely painful.

I shall conclude by spelling out what we should do. We need to tackle the so-called black hole in Government finances with a set of policies that improve the level of

[Mr. Ken Livingstone]

investment. A clear and obvious approach would be a tax on dividends. That would immediately bring in billions of pounds to the Government, thus eliminating borrowing problems. At the same time, we would create a climate in which business would be encouraged to invest rather than to consume profits. That would put us more in the frame of mind of, for example, German and Japanese corporate leaders.

The second obvious option is the utilities tax, which the Government are committed to introducing. How much better it would be if we were to pitch the tax at a realistic level of £10 billion. I do not take that figure simply on the basis of saying that that is twice what we think that we shall get from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is the figure which every independent City analyst of what the utilities could sustain has said is possible. If the utilities can sustain it, we should encourage them to make a major contribution to the restoration of sanity in our public finances and the increase in investment.

If either of those options were too radical, I can think of many other areas. We could have a higher rate of capital gains tax on short-term profit-taking—once more, bringing money into government, but encouraging long-term investment by British industry. Certainly, we should think in terms of halving the rate of advanced corporation tax relief from 20 to 10 per cent.

Between all those, we can get the money from the corporate sector to restore some semblance of balance. I suppose that some people would criticise that as quite a monetarist approach, but those are radical measures which need to be taken. I would not want to be divisive in these days of harmony, but it struck me as odd that the cost of keeping British troops in Germany is between £2 billion and £3 billion. Given that the Russians have gone home and could not fight their way across Chechnya, I do not think that they are going to sweep across the central European plain. It seems barmy that we are paying between £2 billion and £3 billion a year to keep British forces in Germany.

Finally, we must consider what the individual should be contributing. At a time when we have major problems with financing and under-investment, we look as though we are set for another mini consumer boom of the same sort that was orchestrated by Nigel Lawson in the 1980s, although on a smaller scale. Look at the pattern. Consumer spending is already increasing and outstripping the growth of gross domestic product—an unsustainable position. Also, £30 billion in windfalls is about to land in the pockets of people throughout the country from the flotation of insurance companies and building societies, all of which could fuel a massive consumer boom. We are already starting to see the impact of that in London and the south-east, where house prices have started to rocket again, particularly those at the top end of the market.

I see some Opposition Members nodding enthusiastically at the return to the lunacies of Lawson. The trouble is that those sort of lunacies have to be corrected by a savage recession to restore the damage—a recession of the sort that we lived through in the late 1980s and 1990s. Therefore, there would be a boom that mainly benefited the well-off in the south-east, but the consequences would fall on industry and the population in general, once again wiping out a substantial proportion of our industrial base.

While we should tackle the underfinancing of the state by the corporate sector, we also need to consider what the individual should be putting in. It is clear that we cannot go back on our commitment not to raise the basic or top rate of tax, but we should remove the loopholes because they are almost exclusively used by the very well-off. We should consider a substantial increase in stamp duty for the more expensive end of the homes market. I certainly hope that we will consider eliminating mortgage tax relief—anything that removed this obsession that we have with investing in our housing, rather than in industry, would be well worth doing.

Finally, what of national insurance contributions? We were rather vague about those during the general election campaign, thank God. We have left ourselves the freedom to remove the cut-off on those contributions. I do not want to be unpleasant to anyone who is struggling on a middle income, but why not have national insurance contributions paid on all earnings over £50,000? Why not a double levy on all earnings over £100,000, so that those who have done best in the past 18 years, can make a bigger contribution now to resolving the mess that we have inherited?

I have spelt out more than enough tax increases to close the gap in Government financing. We should also restore substantially the contingency fund because I suspect that in the next year we will find that we have been left many crises by the outgoing Government, for example, in the funding of the health service and education.

If we restore the public finance and stop borrowing this year to fund revenue spending, we should create the climate and the markets in which long-term interest rates come down. My only worry is that the mindset of many people on the new Monetary Policy Committee may mean that we have to do something incredibly radical to break them out of their fixation with increased interest rates.

Perhaps when Eddie George retires and the shadow Chancellor has finally been worked over by his own party, we could do a lot worse than appoint him as Governor of the Bank of England, as he obviously had the right approach as Chancellor, of favouring the needs of industry over those of the City.

12.20 am

The Paymaster General (Mr. Geoffrey Robinson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) on securing the debate. He will be aware that he has provided me with a unique occasion on which to make my ministerial debut in front of a tense, crowded and excited House. If the debate does not entirely fulfil his expectations, he might reflect on the subject that he has chosen and its timing—the public sector borrowing requirement, a few weeks ahead of the Budget. I crave his indulgence, as I fear that I may not rise to his expectations.

The Government's central economic objective is high and stable levels of growth and employment, so that we may improve the living standards of all, and not just the few. That can be achieved only with monetary and fiscal stability, as the essential framework for reviving long-term economic performance.

The Chancellor's announcement of 7 May, giving the Bank of England responsibility for setting interest rates, will go some way towards providing the low inflation and stable interest rates necessary for a successful economy. My hon. Friend referred to the fact that the Chancellor showed exceptional boldness in moving within a few days of taking office to provide the Bank of England with the necessary autonomy to set interest rates, while—this is an important point that my hon. Friend did not make—retaining for the Government the essential responsibility for setting the inflation target.

My hon. Friend made light-hearted reference to the establishment of the Monetary Policy Committee, which is a further important step towards providing the stability that we need. If one thing is clear from the 18 years of Tory rule, it is that the biggest enemy of growth is the boom and bust economy that the Tories created.

We had the two deepest recessions in the post-war period, with unsustainable booms occurring intermittently between them. That is the biggest enemy of the investment in skills, infrastructure, education and industry that my hon. Friend wishes to see. That view is shared by all Labour Members. Unless we can get that stability and that long-term view of the management of economic policy, we shall not get the investment and savings that he referred to as the essential basis on which to build our economic policy.

My hon. Friend rightly made much of the mismanagement of the PSBR under the Tories. At its peak, in 1993–94, the PSBR was more than £45 billion, or 7 per cent. of gross domestic product—more than twice the Maastricht criterion to which my hon. Friend referred. The previous year, 1992–93—not coincidentally, the year of the general election—it was more than 6 per cent. of GDP. Traditionally, as we know, the Tories manage to engineer a pre-election consumer boom in an election year, and that year was no exception.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): If allowing the Bank of England to ratchet up interest rates untrammelled is such a good idea for industry, why have the Confederation of British Industry, the Engineering Employers Federation and other broad-based groups speaking for industry complained so bitterly about the trend in interest rates and the overvalued pound that is a consequence?

Mr. Robinson: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She overlooks the fact that the CBI welcomed the steps that we took to give the Bank of England independence, to establish the monetary committee and to separate regulation from the Bank so that it can concentrate on its core function, the delivery of the inflation target set by the Government. It is no good trying to get away from the central basis for what we need: stability and steady, sustainable growth. There is no solution other than growth to our economic problems, but growth must be sustainable, and it can be sustainable only if we get away from the stop-go economics of the past.

Of course, the Conservatives saw the error of their ways immediately after the 1992 general election and predicted in every subsequent Budget that the public finances would be put back on a sound footing with the PSBR getting back to balance "over the medium term", to quote the former Chancellor. That has not happened. The projected date for balance has been pushed back year after year, and the underlying problem of public finances has not been addressed. In fact, the burden of public debt has risen, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East rightly said, by almost two thirds since 1990–91. Six years into the recovery, the Budget deficit is still high.

The Chancellor has already taken action to strengthen fiscal stability. The announcement that the conventions and assumptions underlying the current economic forecasts are to be examined by Sir John Bourn, the head of the independent National Audit Office, shows that the Government are determined to improve the credibility of the public finances. The Government's willingness to be more open and accountable in probing our fiscal projections is an impressive innovation. However, we must also have clear guidelines on how the public finances are to be managed.

Although the PSBR has fallen from the very high levels of a few years ago, we would still like significant further improvement before we can be confident that the public finances are on a sound long-term footing. To achieve that, the Government have promised to take a tough approach to the public finances. We have two clear principles on how they should be managed. First, and my hon. Friend made some telling points on this, we shall enforce the golden rule. That means that over the economic cycle, we shall borrow only to finance public investment and not current expenditure. Secondly, over the economic cycle we shall ensure that public debt as a proportion of national income is at a stable and prudent level.

To achieve those aims, the Government will need to have firm control over public spending. We have committed ourselves to existing public spending plans for 1997-98 and 1998-99. That will help to bring the public finances under control and give Departments the time that they need to undertake the comprehensive spending review announced by the Prime Minister. The review will examine how the Government's priorities can best be met within available resources and will focus on the medium term.

The Government will be a wise spender, not a big spender. The myth that spending is the solution to all problems has been well and truly dispelled by the Conservative Administrations. Under the Conservatives, spending rose and average spending was a higher proportion of national income than it was when the previous Labour Government left office. Those higher levels of spending have not succeeded in bringing about greater fairness or less poverty. The number of people of working age dependent on social security benefits has increased over the past 18 years. Almost one in five households of working age contain no one in work. Eighteen years of Tory government have shown that the overall level of public spending is neither the best, nor a particularly good, measure of the effectiveness of government in meeting the public interest.

Under this Government, public spending decisions will be guided by three principles. First, the Government do not have to act on their own in every area. The public interest can be met by the Government setting standards for the private sector—by the public sector working with the private sector to meet shared objectives. Labour pioneered the idea of public-private partnerships. Labour local authorities have done most to create such partnerships at local level. Since we took office, we have announced a review of the private finance initiative to investigate what obstacles stand in the way of bringing

[Mr. Robinson]

projects to fruition and how the process can be streamlined. We have already ended universal testing, which has been a recipe for frustration and delay. We have set up the review that is being undertaken by Malcolm Bates to find out how we can further streamline the process in the centre of government, to ensure that the PFI is much more effective. We have also asked each Department to come forward with its own priorities and to have a general plan against which we can judge where we can best bring those priorities forward in the public interest.

Secondly, we believe that efficiency and value for money are of prime importance. Every penny of public spending must be justified by its objectives and efficiency.

Thirdly, public spending decisions must be based on clear priorities. The Government aim to shift public spending away from welfare arising from economic failure and towards spending on public investment, including investment in education and skills. By justifying public spending decisions with reference to those priorities, we shall ensure that public funds are put to the best use.

As with public spending, the Government have clear principles by which tax policy will be guided. Our manifesto stated:

"There will be no return to the penal tax rates that existed under both Labour and Conservative Governments in the 1970s."

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East endorse that. I did not always think that I might live to see that day after his performance in a certain other distinguished role that he played at about the same time that I was also running a different sort of organisation, but there we are.

Instead of a return to such penal tax rates, the Government will shape tax policy to encourage employment opportunities and work incentives for all and to promote savings and investment. It will also be designed to be fair and to be seen to be fair. The windfall tax comes within that framework. It also allows us to fulfil an important manifesto pledge to take 250,000 young people and long-term unemployed off benefit and give them the opportunity of work, education and training.

Those principles also lie behind the Government's intention to reduce VAT on fuel to 5 per cent. in the forthcoming Budget, and our pledge not to extend VAT to food, children's clothes, books, newspapers and public transport fares.

Those are the policies for the way forward for the current Government, to bring our borrowing down to acceptable levels, to ensure growth, and to achieve our economic objectives.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 10 June 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

PRIVATE BILLS (PROCEDURE)

Motion made,

That—

(1) the Promoters of every Private Bill which originated in this House or was brought from the House of Lords in the last Parliament shall have leave to proceed with that Bill, if they think fit, in the present Session;

(2) every such Bill which originated in this House shall be presented to the House not later than the fifth day on which the House sits after this day;

(3) there shall be deposited with every Bill so presented a declaration signed by the Agent for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Parliament;

(4) every Bill so presented shall be laid by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the Table of the House on the next Meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill was presented;

(5) every Bill so laid on the Table shall be deemed to have been read the first time and (if the Bill had been read a second time in the last Parliament) to have been read a second time and—

(i) if such Bill had been referred to the Committee on Unopposed Bills in the last Parliament, it shall stand so referred;

(ii) if such Bill had been referred to a Committee during the last Parliament and not reported by that Committee to the House, the Bill shall stand committed and—

(a) all Petitions against the Bill which stood referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session, subject to the determination of any outstanding objection to the locus standi of any petitioner; and

(b) any minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

(iii) if such Bill had been reported by any Committee, it shall be ordered to be read the third time unless it had been reported with Amendments in the last Parliament and had not been considered as so amended, in which case it shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

(iv) if such Bill had been read the third time in the last Parliament, it shall be deemed to have been read the third time;

(6) paragraph (2) of Standing Order 166 relating to Private Business (First reading) shall not apply to any Bill brought from the House of Lords in the present Session and to which this Order relates;

(7) when any Bill which was brought from the House of Lords in the last Parliament and to which this Order relates is brought from the House of Lords in the present Session, the Agent for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration, signed by him, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the House of Lords in the last Parliament and, as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office that such a declaration has been so deposited has been laid upon the Table of the House—

(i) unless the Examiner had reported pursuant to Standing Order 74 relating to Private Business (Examination of bills brought from the House of Lords, etc.), the Bill shall stand referred to the Examiners;

(ii) if the Examiner had so reported, the Bill shall be ordered to be read a second time, or, if it had been read a second time, it shall be read a second time and committed; but

(iii) if the Bill had been reported by a Committee with Amendments in the last Parliament it shall be committed to the Chairman of Ways and Means who shall make only such Amendments to the Bill as had been made thereto by the Committee in the last Parliament, and shall report the Bill to the House forthwith, and the Bill shall be ordered to lie upon the Table;

(8) any Bill which under the provisions of this Order is deemed to have been read the first time, or the first and second time, or the first, second and third time, shall be recorded in the Journal of the House as having been so read;

(9) without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph (5) of this Order, only those Petitions against any Bill which stood referred to the Committee on the Bill and which had not been withdrawn or had been deposited pursuant to paragraph (b) of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business (Reference to committee of petitions against bill) shall stand referred to the Committee on the same Bill in the present Session;

(10) in relation to any Bill to which this Order applies Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business (Right of audience before committees on opposed bills) shall have effect as if the words "under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against bill)" were omitted.

(11) where any Standing Order had been dispensed with in respect of any private Bill in the last Parliament, those Standing Orders shall be deemed to have been ordered to be dispensed with in respect of any such Bill presented or brought from the Lords in pursuance of this Order;

(12) any Standing Orders complied with in respect of any Bill originating in the House of Lords to which this Order relates shall be deemed to have been complied with in respect of such Bill if the same is brought from the House of Lords in the present Session, and any notices published or given and any deposits made in respect of such Bill in the last Parliament shall be held to have been published, given and made, respectively, for the Bill so brought from the House of Lords in the present Session;

(13) no further fees shall be charged in respect of proceedings on a Bill in respect of which fees have been incurred in the last Parliament.

That this Order be a Standing Order of the House.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Monday 16 June at 7 o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Government Communications Headquarters, Cheltenham

1. **Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on trade union rights at GCHQ. [1158]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook): I announced on 15 May that we were fulfilling our long-standing commitment to restore to staff at GCHQ the freedom to join the independent trade union of their choice. Management and unions will shortly commence negotiations on a collective agreement to provide safeguards against disruption. GCHQ staff make a valuable contribution to protecting the liberties and freedoms of our country. They are now able to share fully in one of the important liberties that they defend.

Mr. Trickett: Will the Foreign Secretary accept that millions of people, both here and abroad, will welcome his statement this afternoon? Does he agree with the sacked GCHQ workers that this was a wrong that was righted at long last? Does he accept that the ban on trade unions at GCHQ has done us profound damage abroad and that, while the ban continued, it was impossible for this country to lecture others on respect for human rights?

Mr. Cook: I am glad of the warm welcome that has been given to our announcement by many of the 14 members of staff who were dismissed because of their refusal to give up trade union activity. The Labour party has never accepted the vile slur on which the ban was based: that people cannot be patriotic and also loyal to a trade union. That was a slur not just on the GCHQ staff, but on millions of patriotic trade union members and I am glad that we have put that right.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it was a mistake for the national unions to call GCHQ workers out on strike? Will he name another country in the western world where people involved in signals intelligence were able either to join a union or to go on strike? Would he care to say whether he would like his staff overseas to be able to go on declaring around the world that this country is now virtually national-strike-free?

Mr. Cook: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that this country will continue to do its duty and will see that duty done by its staff abroad. We have seen an excellent example of the way in which Foreign Office staff work without regard to any consideration of rights and conditions in the way that our staff at Sierra Leone managed the magnificent evacuation of 2,000 people, which was done by only five people working around the clock. Therefore, the slur that the hon. Gentleman makes on Foreign Office staff is unacceptable.

We are considering the provision, by collective agreement, against disruption by GCHQ staff, but the hon. Gentleman is very wide of the mark. Far from being the odd one out now because we have restored the rights to join a trade union at GCHQ, it was during the period of the hon. Gentleman's Government that Britain was out of step with the rest of the world and was nearly required to leave the International Labour Organisation because we could not meet its conditions.

Mr. Nigel Jones: I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on removing the ban on trade union rights for GCHQ staff.

Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider the possibility of compensating those 14 workers who were sacked because of continuing to stick to their principles? Most of them are my constituents. Mike Grindley, Clive Lloyd—all those brave people stuck to their principles through thick and thin and deserve some recognition for that.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's congratulations.

I understand that compensation is being discussed between management and the 14 people concerned. Compensation was paid to the limit at the time of their dismissal. We would have to think carefully before we undertook any commitment to compensate people who lost employment during the 18 years of the previous Government, or the bill could be very large indeed.

Human Rights

2. **Mr. Hutton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the Government's policy on human rights. [1159]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): We have made it clear that human rights will be a central element of this Government's foreign policy. As set out by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in the mission statement of 12 May, we shall work through international forums and bilateral relationships to spread the values of human rights, civil liberties and democracy that we demand for ourselves.

Mr. Hutton: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment, and welcome the new emphasis that the Government are placing on promoting human rights around the world. I think that it will be strongly supported by the British people.

Does my hon. Friend agree that a significant step towards protecting human rights would be the establishment of a permanent international criminal court with extensive jurisdiction to try cases involving serious human rights abuses? What measures will the Government take in that regard?

Mr. Lloyd: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. We appreciate the warm reception that the changed policy on human rights has received not just in this country, but throughout the world.

We support the proposal for an international criminal court, not only in principle but in practice. We intend to participate actively in the work of the preparatory

committee, and in the other meetings to negotiate a statute for the court. We strongly support the idea of holding a diplomatic conference in 1998 to establish that court. We intend to ensure that any doubts that have existed in the past about the British Government's commitment will be dispelled by this Government: we want an effective international criminal court.

Mr. John M. Taylor: Would the Minister be sympathetic to the incorporation of the European convention on human rights into domestic law?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes, we would be sympathetic to that.

Mrs. Clwyd: May I say how glad I am to see my hon. Friend and the rest of the foreign affairs team on the Front Bench, and how delighted we are that human rights has been put at the front of the Department's agenda?

Given the continuing evidence that arms exports to Indonesia are being used for internal repression, what consideration has my hon. Friend given to banning arms exports to Indonesia outright?

Mr. Lloyd: We have serious concerns about human rights in Indonesia. One of the first actions of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my hon. Friend the Minister of State was to ask for an investigation of the events in Bandung and Jakarta.

My hon. Friend will know that, on 22 May, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced that the Government would conduct a review of the mechanics and the detailed criteria used in the issuing of licences for exports of conventional arms. Perhaps my hon. Friend will forgive me if I say that it would be practically premature for us to give any specific country-by-country response at this stage.

Dr. Fox: I, too, welcome the Minister to his post. Does he agree with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the last Government were right to export Hawk aircraft to Indonesia?

Mr. Lloyd: I can only repeat that, while we make it clear that the human rights dimension is an important part of the way in which we shall consider applications for export licences, the review announced by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not yet been completed, although it will be completed very rapidly. Until that time, it would be foolish for us to make any further comment.

China

3. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about UK relations with China. [1160]

13. **Sir Archie Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the implications of the Government's human rights stance for trade relations with China. [1170]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Derek Fatchett): China has emerged as a major power with a rapidly growing economy. That, in turn, will lead to internal change within Chinese society. We want to open a new chapter of more constructive relations with China across the board, addressing both trade and more difficult issues such as human rights. Transparency and the rule of law are important both on human rights grounds and as a basis for sound commercial relations.

Mr. Campbell: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. In the recent past, our European partners have had better relationships with China. Does my hon. Friend envisage any stumbling blocks in the future? Can the handover of Hong Kong become a bridge towards a better relationship with China, rather than the stumbling block that it has constituted in the past?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend is right to say that it is important to open a new chapter in our relations with China. We are all keen to make a success of the handover of Hong Kong, and to ensure that it constitutes a bridge between our two countries rather than a barrier; but, at the same time, we must address difficult and important issues with China. The human rights agenda will be important to us, and I can tell my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend and I have already raised our concerns about human rights in our meetings with the ambassador.

Sir Archie Hamilton: Does the Minister agree that there is a balance between trade and human rights, and that, if he presses the human rights case too hard, we shall lose in trade? What are the implications of that for British jobs?

Mr. Fatchett: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there is a balance, but it is not a question of either/or. We must be concerned about human rights, as we are concerned about developing trade, and we can use the opportunities of trade to expand the human rights agenda. I am a little surprised, however, that the right hon. Gentleman finds time to lecture the Government on their record of trade with China, when the previous Government did not pay much regard to the human rights agenda. Their trade performance with China was considerably worse than that of other countries, which gave much more priority to the human rights agenda.

Mr. MacShane: I welcome my hon. Friend to his post and invite him to take no notice of lectures on human rights from the Conservatives, whose performance in office was an international scandal.

On China, may I invite my hon. Friend to continue to exert pressure for the release of Wei Jing Sheng, the distinguished democracy wall writer, often called the Sakharov of China, whose continued imprisonment for his writings remains very much a stone in the shoe of amicable relations between China and our and other democratic countries?

Mr. Fatchett: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening comments and for the comments that he made about the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Sir A. Hamilton). I must say that it is a pleasure to see

the right hon. Gentleman here, rather than carrying out his other duties as returning officer today, which I thought might be even more important to him.

My hon. Friend draws attention to an important case in China. I give my hon. Friend a clear commitment that, on individual cases and in general, we shall continue to press the human rights agenda. It is important to us, and my hon. Friend will see the change in the flavour of the Government's approach.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will the hon. Gentleman make certain that, in all Her Majesty's Government's dealings with China, the issue of Tibet is not forgotten and rolled under the carpet? Is it not the case that the systematic abuse of human rights and of the people of Tibet for very many years by the Chinese authorities has seriously prejudiced the view that people in the free world hold of the People's Republic of China, and that, in the long term, it must be detrimental to trading relations also unless the authorities do something to improve human rights in Tibet?

Mr. Fatchett: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns. We also appreciate the important human rights agenda in relation to Tibet; the hon. Gentleman made those points with great force. In the meetings that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have had individually with the ambassador, the issue of human rights has been raised, and Tibet is on that agenda.

Mr. Barry Jones: How will the Ministers assist the exports into the republic of the products of British Aerospace and Airbus Industrie, in Europe? Does my hon. Friend agree that aerospace is one of our biggest industries, using skilled labour, and that there is a huge market in the republic?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend is correct to point out the importance of raising our trade profile with China. As he knows from my earlier response, we have not performed as well in China as we have other countries, and there is a clear lesson to be learnt from the failures of the previous Government in that regard. We shall build up a much more positive relationship with China.

On the specific issue of Airbus, I notice the success of President Chirac in his recent visit. Perhaps we should send a few words of thanks to President Chirac, because he brought work and jobs, not only to France, but to the United Kingdom.

Middle East Peace Process

4. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the Prime Minister of Israel to discuss the middle east peace process; and if he will make a statement. [1161]

Mr. Fatchett: When I visited the front-line peace process states, on 25 to 30 May, I was not able to meet Prime Minister Netanyahu, who was attending an urgent summit with President Mubarak. My visit reflected the high priority that we give to the search for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the middle east, and the close contact that we maintain with the region's leaders. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs very much hopes to visit the region in the autumn.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful for that answer. Will the Minister join me in condemning the murder of three Palestinian land agents and the attempted murder of a fourth Palestinian land agent by fellow Palestinians? Is he aware that those murders have been tacitly encouraged by certain senior officers of the Palestine National Authority? Does he agree that that can be of no help to the peace process?

Mr. Fatchett: I can do better than join the hon. Gentleman in the points that he makes. I have already publicly condemned the actions and the events to which he refers, and I have already made it clear to the Palestine National Authority that, equally, it should condemn such activities. I have made the same point to the Authority in another way, by telling it that, although it has many friends in the United Kingdom who understand the Palestinians' case, it does not help that case by failing to condemn the type of activity mentioned by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Ivan Lewis: When he spoke to the Palestine National Authority, did my hon. Friend offer it the Government's support for its difficult work? However, did he also make it clear that there are significant concerns about the Authority's use of the public money that it is receiving from international sources, because of serious allegations that a significant proportion of that money is not being used appropriately?

Mr. Fatchett: I can assure my hon. Friend that I expressed those concerns publicly, and privately, in my meeting with Prime Minister Arafat. It is important to all public and private donors to the Palestinian Authority that all money is accounted for and that there is a clear rule of law in the administration of public funds. I have made those points clear, and, in the context of Palestine, I have said that our approach to human rights is not a la carte. We shall have universal principles, and we shall apply those in each and every circumstance.

Mr. Soames: If the Government are truly interested in promoting human rights, will the Minister confirm that, when he next meets the Israeli Prime Minister, he will tell him that the Government of Israel have done a great wrong and harm, as they continue to do, to the Palestinians? To move the peace process further and faster along, will the Minister assure the House that he will listen with care and attention to the views of our friends and allies in the Gulf, whose views on those matters are not always given the attention that they deserve?

Mr. Fatchett: I always felt that the hon. Gentleman would do better in opposition than in government, and his question shows that that is the case. We are keen to push forward the peace process, to ensure that we achieve a just and comprehensive peace that provides political integrity and prosperity for the Palestinians and security for the Israelis. We shall do all we can to ensure that we are an active player in that process.

Mr. Ernie Ross: I congratulate my hon. Friend not only on taking up his position as Minister with responsibility for middle east affairs but on his most recent visit to the area, which went down very well.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend on his visit to Har Homa. Does he regret that he was unable to meet Prime Minister Netanyahu, so that he could make it clear to him that the Alon-plus plan—which Mr. Netanyahu has begun to float as a means of resolving the final settlement of Palestinians—is not acceptable either to the Palestinians or to the international community should it deny the possibility of a land link between a Palestinian state and its Arab neighbour, Jordan?

Mr. Fatchett: I am again grateful for the kind words from my hon. Friend, although I do not know how long the love-in between Ministers and Back Benchers will continue.

My hon. Friend is right to say that any final settlement must take full account of the wishes and aspirations of the Palestinian people. If the Palestinian entity is to be successful and durable, it will have to ensure that it has a proper land mass and a proper identity to meet those aspirations. Those are issues for the final status negotiations, which we are keen to ensure start with a real chance of success.

BBC World Service

6. **Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future of the BBC World Service. [1163]

Mr. Fatchett: The BBC World Service makes a vital contribution to the promotion of Britain abroad. We want it to flourish and in doing so continue to build on its outstanding international reputation for objective news and comment. Through the Foreign Office and BBC World Service working group, we shall continue to ensure the maintenance of a special quality, style and ethos for the World Service's output.

Mr. Öpik: I thank the Minister for his answer. Would he consider introducing the practice of providing the World Service with funding intentions for five years ahead so that it can improve its strategic planning ability? Will he reaffirm the Government's support for the World Service's intention to create programmes in foreign languages for areas it deems best served by television rather than by radio?

Mr. Fatchett: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question, which gives me the opportunity to sing the praises of the BBC World Service. It is an important part of this country's diplomatic activities. It is clear, whatever country one visits in the world, that the reputation of the BBC and therefore of Britain is extremely high.

On the specific issues that the hon. Gentleman mentions, I reassure him that the number of languages covered by the BBC World Service has increased in recent years. The question of balance is always under consideration. The hon. Gentleman's funding point will be taken into account along with all the other funding issues in the Government's comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Pond: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment to his post and I welcome his comments about the importance of the BBC World Service, not only because of its diplomatic importance, but because of the important cultural role it performs. As my hon. Friend will be aware, until fairly recently the World Service was subject to a three-year funding programme which gave it some opportunity to plan ahead and to take advantage of potential developments. Under the previous Administration, without consultation and unilaterally, that arrangement was withdrawn. The World Service now has to operate on the basis of annual funding which makes it difficult for it to fulfil its potential. Will my hon. Friend consider reviewing the basis of funding?

Mr. Fatchett: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that any decisions taken about the BBC World Service's financial structure will follow detailed consultation with the BBC World Service. The detail and the outcome are, of course, subject to the Government's comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Garnier: How much money has the Foreign Office given the BBC World Service in this financial year and how much will it give in the next two financial years?

Mr. Fatchett: I am slightly surprised by the hon. and learned Gentleman's question, because he raises an issue to which he clearly knows the answer. The rules are set out in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office annual report. I suggest that the hon. and learned Gentleman finds the Library; the information will be there and readily available to him. He will also find there the figures for the next two financial years. I said to the hon. Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Soames) that I thought that he would do well in opposition. One thing is certain; the hon. and learned Gentleman's performance in opposition will be no better than his performance in government; it will be equally bad.

Hong Kong

7. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the handover of Hong Kong to China. [1164]

Mr. Robin Cook: A successful transition for Hong Kong is one of our highest priorities. We are committed to doing all that we can, working with the Government of China and the incoming Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, to secure Hong Kong's continuing stability, prosperity and freedoms through and beyond the handover, on the basis of the Joint Declaration.

Mrs. Mahon: I welcome my right hon. Friend to his position. Does he agree that Hong Kong's continued success will depend on the rule of law and on civil and political freedoms?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the success of the Hong Kong economy depends very much on the rule of law and the liberties of Hong Kong, which are protected by the Joint Declaration until 2047. I can assure the House that the Government will continue to monitor the observance of those liberties and report on

that to the House every six months. The Joint Liaison Group has a continuing role until 2000 monitoring the conduct of the Joint Declaration. We shall play a full part in that. We shall also work with our international allies to make sure that international interest continues to be shown in Hong Kong so that we fulfil our obligation to the people of Hong Kong that the handover terms are honoured in the years ahead.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I also congratulate the Foreign Secretary on his appointment.

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the House, and indeed the other place, should have a continuing role in monitoring what goes on in Hong Kong until 2047? Does he consider that it would be appropriate to set up a special Committee for that very purpose?

Mr. Cook: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that Britain's interest in Hong Kong must not end at midnight on 30 June. We shall have a strong continuing interest, both commercially and as one of the architects of the Joint Declaration, in making sure that its freedoms are observed. A Committee of the House may well serve a purpose, but that is essentially a matter for the House to resolve. I certainly intend to keep the House informed, and I hope that hon. Members will wish to participate in debates on the matter.

Mr. Rowlands: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Chinese authorities have announced their intention to dismiss some of those who were democratically elected in Hong Kong and carry popular support? Will he therefore convey to the Chinese authorities our strength of feeling on that issue and encourage our European Union partners and the United States to do so as well?

Mr. Cook: I can assure my hon. Friend that, in opposition, in government and in the House, I have roundly condemned the action of the Chinese Government in dismissing the elected Legislative Council of Hong Kong and their intention to replace it on 1 July with a Legislative Council appointed by a committee set up by Beijing. There is no way in which we can accept that as a proper implementation of the Joint Declaration or as demonstrating respect for the democratic choices of the people of Hong Kong. We shall continue to press that view. In the meantime, we attach particular importance to the commitment of the Chinese Government to hold free and fair elections for a new Legislative Council within 12 months, and we expect that commitment to be fulfilled.

Social Chapter

8. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his European colleagues on the introduction of the social chapter into the United Kingdom. [1165]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Doug Henderson): Incorporation of the social chapter into the main EC treaty and its extension to the United Kingdom are being considered within the intergovernmental conference. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have discussed the issue with a number of my European colleagues both in bilateral meetings and at IGC sessions.

Mr. Streeter: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post.

Given that future new directives under the social chapter can be introduced by qualified majority voting, what guarantee can the Minister give the House today that future new directives will not be imposed on the United Kingdom if they are harmful to its interests?

Mr. Henderson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his initial kind remarks.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that the previous Government participated in the initial discussions on the establishment of a social chapter and had the opportunity to become involved in the regulations that were drawn up at that time. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are provisions for extension under qualified majority voting. One of the proposals currently under consideration concerns the burden of proof. I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that our European partners are following Britain's example, principles and practice in that matter. That is an early sign of the positive contribution that Britain is making to the new climate in Europe.

Dr. Palmer: Is the Minister aware of the widespread astonishment in Europe that a national political party in Britain actually opposes the very limited rights laid down in the social chapter? Is he further aware that that astonishment is shared by my predecessor, the former Conservative Member for Broxstowe?

Mr. Henderson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is interesting at European meetings when our partners ask why Britain failed to score any goals in the past. I am delighted to say that one could not expect anything else when they were not on the playing field in the first place.

Mr. David Davis: The Minister signally failed to answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for South–West Devon (Mr. Streeter). He has clearly forgotten that Labour proposed to sign the social chapter. If the proposal to extend the works council directive to firms of only 50 employees is carried by majority voting, will the Government implement the decision?

Mr. Henderson: The Government are bound by European treaties. There is no question of a British Government not complying with treaties. Due to the positive climate in Europe, we are able to insist among our colleagues that there be a full examination of all the issues and principles involved and that British organisations, such as the Institute of Directors, be invited to give evidence. When we have heard that evidence, we will come to conclusions.

Kashmir

9. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with representatives of the Pakistan and Indian Governments about the position in Kashmir. [1166]

Mr. Fatchett: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed Kashmir with the Indian Prime Minister's envoy on 21 May. I intend to discuss the issue during visits to India and Pakistan later this week.

Mr. Pike: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment. Would there be any better way in which to celebrate the 50th anniversary of independence for Pakistan and India than to resolve the long outstanding problem of Kashmir? Although the key to unlocking the problem is clearly in the hands of India, with a positive response from Pakistan, will my hon. Friend make it clear that the new British Government intend to take a much more positive attitude in trying to end this long-running problem?

Mr. Fatchett: My hon. Friend has taken a long and very keen interest in the issue of Kashmir and what is happening in Kashmir and to the people of Kashmir. He is absolutely right to say that a breakthrough in relations between India and Pakistan would be very appropriate in the 50th year of independence.

We warmly welcome the new atmosphere that seems to have been generated recently and anticipate with hope the talks between the Pakistan and Indian Governments. We hope that they will create a totally new framework of relationships between India and Pakistan. As my hon. Friend knows, we as a party, and now as a Government, have expressed our keen interest in developing relations with India and Pakistan and looking for a solution to the problems in Kashmir. We have also said on many occasions that, if it would be of any assistance to the two Governments, we would be willing to play a constructive role.

Mr. Colvin: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Government Front Bench. Will he consider two initiatives that the United Kingdom could take? First, the Government could convene a conference between India and Pakistan under the provisions of the Simla agreement of 1972 and, with the agreement of both sides, chair that conference. Secondly, bearing in mind that the dispute is between Commonwealth states, will he consider finding a way of putting the problem of Kashmir on the agenda of the next conference of heads of state of Commonwealth countries?

Mr. Fatchett: We would very much encourage the talks between the Indian and Pakistan Governments. We see that as the most appropriate way in which to make progress. The framework for the talks has been provided by United Nations resolutions and the Simla agreement, but we would initially look to the parties themselves as the best way in which to get a lasting and just solution to the problems.

Europe (Government Policy)

10. **Mr. Radice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards Europe. [1167]

Mr. Robin Cook: We believe that our membership of the European Union is vital to Britain's exports and jobs, improves the security of our continent and increases our clout in trade talks and world affairs. We are committed to developing a people's Europe that is more open to the citizens of Britain and the continent and more relevant to their concerns about jobs, crime and the environment. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made excellent progress towards that objective yesterday when he obtained agreement at Ecofin to boost jobs through improving employability, completing the single market and promoting economic growth.

Mr. Radice: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new position and thank him for his statement. Does he agree that last night's Division, in which the biggest pro-European vote ever was recorded in the House, is an overwhelming endorsement of the Government's new constructive approach and makes it much more likely that we will get an agreement in Amsterdam that is good for Britain and good for Europe?

Mr. Cook: As my hon. Friend will have observed, in our first month in office we have achieved our first objective in relations with the European Union, transforming the negotiating climate for Amsterdam. We shall go ready for some tough bargaining to secure hard gains for Britain. We have every prospect of achieving progress for Europe and a good deal for Britain, including a legal basis for our border controls, which was never obtained by the Conservatives.

Miss McIntosh: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the mood of the country is not to sign up to any further erosion of sovereignty or any moves towards federalism? Does he agree with the Director General of the Confederation of British Industry, Mr. Adair Turner, that the only way to maintain our sovereignty is not to sign up to the social chapter and not to give away any more powers to qualified majority voting?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to say that I shall meet Mr. Adair Turner later this week, when I shall have an opportunity to explore his views. This Government are here as a result of the views of the British people who, every time they have been asked, have come out overwhelmingly in support of the social chapter. I find it depressing that, despite the result of the last election, which contributed to the outcome of last night's Division, the Conservatives seem to have learnt no lessons and not changed their tune, despite their overwhelming rejection by the British people.

Mr. Derek Foster: I welcome my right hon. Friend and his colleagues to their Front-Bench positions. Now that the Prime Minister has put Great Britain at the heart of Europe, will he explain to our European partners that, if economic and monetary union is to succeed, it has to address the people's agenda of jobs and growth and that, if it does not address that agenda, regardless of whether it goes ahead on time, it cannot succeed?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to say that my right hon. Friend said firmly in Sweden that what is important for the peoples of Europe is that we strengthen our economies, not necessarily that we integrate them. That is why we are opening up an agenda addressing the concerns of the people of Europe that will tackle the economy and growth and will focus on their worries about the environment and about organised crime, which knows no borders. If Europe switches to tackling the issues that affect the quality of life of the citizens of Europe, we can restore popular legitimacy for the European project.

Mr. David Heath: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm one issue on which there is a scintilla of doubt? Does it remain the Government's clear intention to introduce proportional representation in time for the 1999 elections to the European Parliament?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to repeat what I said during the month before the general election. It is our wish and intention to introduce a new electoral system based on lists and proportional representation for the next European elections. I said at the time that the timetable is very tight and that legislation will need to be carried through this winter if it is to happen. We are still examining whether that is possible, but we have certainly not ruled it out.

Mr. Gapes: I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post. Will he confirm that the policy of this Government, as opposed to that of their predecessors, will be to work co-operatively—to build alliances rather than to seek inglorious isolation?

Mr. Cook: Glorious isolation did not prove a useful position from which to negotiate. We have demonstrated that by going to Europe in a spirit of partnership, seeking solutions to common problems. We get a much better hearing and a much better answer than if we go in a spirit of sterile, negative opposition, which the Conservatives chose. We go to Europe to do a deal, not to strike postures for a domestic audience as the Conservatives did.

Mrs. Ewing: The Foreign Secretary has rightly placed employment at the heart of the policy issues for the European Union. On behalf of the coastal communities of the United Kingdom, I ask him to respond more effectively to the points raised yesterday about quota hopping by my hon. Friend the Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) and by the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor).

Mr. Cook: The hon. Lady raises a serious and important point, and we have stressed that the issue of quota hopping and the economic future of our fishing communities is one of our high negotiating priorities for Amsterdam. We are hopeful that our discussions with the Commission will produce a package that we can confirm at Amsterdam and that will bring significant economic gains to those communities.

United States

11. **Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to visit Washington to discuss UK-US relations. [1168]

Mr. Robin Cook: I met Secretary of State Albright two weeks ago in Washington and we had a positive and full discussion on US-UK relations. Both sides of the House will want to welcome warmly the outstanding success of President Clinton's visit the other week.

Mr. Smith: Did my right hon. Friend raise with his American counterpart the need for substantial progress at the international environment summit in New York later this month? Will he also raise with her in the future the problem of toxic and radioactive pollution that was left in the United Kingdom in the bases used by the US military?

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that I had a full discussion with Secretary of State Albright on environmental issues of international concern. We are both agreed that, in the next century, the environmental agenda will become much more prominent in international relations, and we look forward to working together at Denver to try to prepare statements on climate change that we can take to the summit in New York the subsequent week. The toxic contamination of US bases is primarily an issue for domestic Departments, but if they ask us for help, we will be pleased to raise the matter with the United States. When we go to international summits to call on other countries to meet the targets necessary to safeguard the global climate, it is important that we show an example in our back yard by ensuring that we have a healthy environment for our people.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Foreign Secretary confirm to President Clinton when he visits him the importance and primacy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and, in particular, American involvement in it? Will he confirm that nothing in his future policies in connection with a European defence policy, whether through the Western European Union or any other body, will water down the importance of NATO's role?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to tell the hon. Gentleman that we have repeatedly stressed to our American allies the importance we attach to NATO. We have worked closely with the Americans in the North Atlantic Council, and will work closely with them on the preparations for the Madrid summit on enlargement. We hope that we will be able to prevent text at the Amsterdam summit that commits us to a merger of the WEU with the European Union. We can see a useful role for the WEU in providing help with peacekeeping and humanitarian missions: we do not see it as a vehicle for the collective defence of western Europe.

Falkland Islands

14. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his talks with Guido di Talla on the future of the Falklands-Mal as. [1171]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend is finalising the details of proposals for an early meeting at which he intends to discuss matters with the Argentine Foreign Minister to improve our already good relations with that country.

Mr. Dalyell: What will we say about the problem of greedy over-fishing in the south Atlantic?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend will know that it was the policy of the previous Government—as it is of this one—to obtain a fisheries agreement with Argentina. We will certainly raise the issue with the Foreign Minister when he visits London and we will ensure that the Argentines understand that we place a high priority on obtaining such an agreement, which would help conserve stocks, which is in the interests of those who fish from the islands and from Argentina.

Mr. Tom King: In view of recent unhelpful comments from Buenos Aires about the expectations that the Argentine Government have of the new Labour Government, will the Minister take this opportunity to make it clear that there has been no change in policy on the sovereignty of the Falklands from that of the previous Government?

Mr. Lloyd: My answer is a firm yes to that question.

Export Trade

15. **Ms Shipley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the measures taken in his Department in co-operation with the Department of Trade and Industry to promote Britain's export trade. [1172]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Foreign Office works hand in hand with the Department of Trade and Industry on export promotion. Together, we have established a new export forum which will consider how to improve our export promotion initiatives.

Ms Shipley: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, among France, Germany, Italy and ourselves, Britain is the only country to have experienced a fall in its share of exports to the tiger economies and in its share of total world exports?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes her point tellingly—[*Laughter.*] I thought that it was superbly researched. It is precisely because of the factors that she described that we made promoting exports and boosting jobs high priorities in our Foreign Office mission statement. I am currently exploring with Lord Simon at the Department of Trade and Industry how we can increase the exchange between business and the Foreign Office to ensure that, both abroad and at home, we have business expertise. I hope to make an announcement before the House rises for the summer on increasing the number of business men on short-term secondments at our posts abroad.

Mr. Baldry: The right hon. Gentleman knows that, excluding Japan, we export more per head of population than any other country in the world. It is, of course, good news that the Foreign Office still intends to promote exports, but how does the right hon. Gentleman intend to reconcile, in many markets, our need to promote exports with the much higher profile to be given to promoting human rights?

Mr. Cook: Of course the hon. Gentleman is right to say that, historically, back into the previous century, Britain has exported a much higher proportion of GDP than many other nations. We have been living off that inheritance, and over the past 10 years the growth in our exports has not been as fast as that of our competitor nations, which have proved more competitive.

Moreover, during that period many of those nations have observed a regard for human rights that outstrips the regard that Britain has shown. I see no contradiction between our twin commitments to ensure that we boost Britain's exports to free economies and its contribution to supporting free democracies. It is Conservative Members who must explain the £800 million loss that they made by exporting arms and other machinery to Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Sheerman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a good sales pitch to have a good human rights record? In the course of his duties, will he do an audit—a proper assessment—of best practice in our outposts around the world? Many of us have experience of our embassies. Some of them in some countries are absolutely excellent, but others are not. I hesitate to name names, but I will mention Berlin, where our embassy is difficult to contact and is hardly ever open to British business men. I hope that we can examine best practice and try to spread it.

Mr. Cook: I hope that our embassy in Berlin will be open in time for the transfer of government. It will be a prestigious building—one of the prime architectural designs of the century. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend made a serious point. He raised an important issue for the many millions of people who work in British exporting industries and made the important point that there may be good practice that succeeds in some embassies which we need to transfer to others. That is one of the reasons we are anxious to take more business men with expertise in the export industries to some of those embassies. They will bring a culture of business application, and share with the diplomats who will remain behind after they have gone the knowledge of what business needs from our posts abroad, so that it can be provided better.

Religious Freedom

16. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's policy in respect of freedom of religious practice and expression. [1173]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are strongly opposed to religious intolerance and discrimination in any form. The Government are committed to the principles enshrined in the universal declaration of human rights, the international covenant on civil and political rights, the European convention on human rights and the declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I thank the Minister for that response. Does he agree that, where there is intolerance in religious practice, whether in Israel, Saudi Arabia or elsewhere, we shall oppose it, because when people come to this country we allow complete freedom of religious practice and expression—which also includes the right to change?

Mr. Lloyd: I endorse the hon. Gentleman's remarks. We extend freedom of religion to all who seek refuge within these shores. We continue to raise questions of religious intolerance with those who practise it in their countries—and will continue to do just that.

Mr. Corbyn: What pressure can my hon. Friend bring to bear on the Iranian regime to lift the fatwa against Salman Rushdie?

Mr. Lloyd: That is an important question. While we view the election of a new Iranian president with interest, it must be made clear to Iran that any improvement in relations between Britain and Iran will depend greatly on the lifting of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, who is after all a British citizen. Indeed, it is outrageous that the fatwa was issued against him in the first place.

Similarly, Iranian Government operations around the world continue to cause concern, not just in terms of religious intolerance but because of their attacks on the basic human rights of their own citizens and others.

European Parliament

17. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the European Parliament. [1174]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We look forward to a close and fruitful relationship with the European Parliament, which has an important legislative function in the EC, particularly in areas that are subject to majority voting in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Lansley: In the coming intergovernmental conference, will the hon. Gentleman resist any extension of powers of co-decision for the European Parliament?

Mr. Henderson: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware from his research background, there are already some such powers. Where there is any extension of qualified majority voting, in many instances we shall be looking for an extension of co-decision.

Mr. Barnes: Why do we not take the high ground in the European Union and argue for fully democratic institutions—including the European Parliament, which should be the fulcrum of democratic activity?

Mr. Henderson: I agree with my hon. Friend that there is a democratic deficit in Europe, partly caused by the Conservative party's inability to elect Members to the European Parliament, so the Conservatives' view is never put. We would welcome an enhanced democratic process in Europe, which is why, in the IGC negotiations, we emphasise the need to extend co-decision in areas of qualified majority voting.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: Does the Minister acknowledge that there is great lack of understanding between Members of this House and Members of the European Parliament? If we are to improve our relationships and thereby underpin the democratic process, what is the Government's view of the plan for greater co-operation between Members of this House and of the European Parliament? Surely that would help us to understand one another much better.

Mr. Henderson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is certainly important that the European Parliament liaises closely with national Parliaments. One reason why, during the IGC negotiations, we have strongly supported moves to improve transparency is to make information more widely available and to enable sensible dialogue to take place between the European Parliament and national Parliaments.

Hong Kong

20. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the proposals for the handover ceremony in Hong Kong. [1177]

Mr. Fatchett: The joint handover ceremony between Britain and China in the grand foyer of the new extension to the Hong Kong convention and exhibition centre will begin at about 23.30 hours Hong Kong time on Monday 30 June. The ceremony will be attended by up to 4,000 invited guests, including His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and me.

Mr. Love: In the light of earlier discussion of this issue, will the Government take the opportunity provided by the handover ceremony to discuss with other Governments represented there the importance of a continuing close interest in the affairs of Hong Kong after the ceremony is over?

Mr. Fatchett: I can assure my hon. Friend that the United Kingdom will have a continuing interest in Hong Kong. We have an interest under the joint declaration and through the work of the joint liaison group. We have an economic interest in Hong Kong's continuing success, and a moral and political interest in maintaining human rights and democratic freedoms. The United Kingdom will continue to be an active partner in Hong Kong's future.

Mr. David Davis: Will the Minister clarify whether the Prime Minister will be attending?

Mr. Fatchett: The right hon. Gentleman will know that no decision has yet been taken on my right hon. Friend's attendance. When a decision is made, he will be among the first to be told.

Commonwealth Summit

21. **Mr. Alasdair Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the arrangements for the Commonwealth summit in Edinburgh. [1178]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Arrangements for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh in October are progressing well. We are working closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Scottish Office and local police authorities in Scotland to ensure a successful meeting, which will serve the Government's aim of strengthening the Commonwealth.

Mr. Morgan: If the Government's plans for a Scottish Parliament reach fruition, what role would the Minister see for it in future summits?

Mr. Lloyd: The question of a Scottish Parliament does not as far as I am aware arise in this context; nor will it be on the agenda for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Edinburgh. I can, however, assure the hon. Gentleman that the meeting will be a successful advertisement both for the Commonwealth and for Edinburgh and the whole of Scotland.

Miss McIntosh: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I would like to give the Minister for Europe the opportunity to withdraw his remark that it is impossible for Conservatives to elect Members of the European Parliament. I am living proof that that is not the case.

Madam Speaker: That is barely a point of order. I am aware of the hon. Lady's status, and I recommend the use of Vacher Dod. I think that the Minister should have something to say on that. He should not be churlish in respect of lady Members.

Mr. Doug Henderson: I am grateful, Madam Speaker. I think that I may inadvertently have said impossible; I meant nearly impossible.

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I wonder whether you have had a request from either the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement this afternoon, given that there have been various reports that prescription charges are to be introduced for pensioners.

Madam Speaker: No Minister has informed me of a statement to be made on any issue today.

Orders of the Day

Education (Schools) Bill

Considered in Committee [Progress, 5 June].

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Clause 2

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR EXISTING ASSISTED PUPILS

Amendment proposed [*5 June*], No. 11, in page 2, line 1, to leave out subsection (2).—[*Mr. Forth.*]

3.32 pm

Question again proposed, That the amendment be made.

The Chairman of Ways and Means: I remind the Committee that we are also discussing the following amendments: No. 27, in page 2, line 1, after '(2)', insert 'Subject to subsection (2A),'.

No. 3, in page 2, line 5, after 'or,' insert—

'(b) in the case of a pupil with an assisted place at a school providing education for children up to the age of 13 but not beyond, at the end of the school year in which he attains the age of 13, or '.

No. 34, in page 2, line 5, after 'or', insert—

(a) at the end of the school year in which he completes his education within the school where he was provided with an assisted place; or'.

No. 28, in page 2, line 10, at end insert—

'(2A) Unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that the pupil in question will receive secondary education which is comparable to the primary education which he has received in regard to—

(a) its religious content;

(b) the curriculum provided;

(c) opportunities for sport;

(d) size of classes; and

(e) single-sex provision,

he shall determine that that pupil shall continue to hold that place during the period which he receives secondary education.'.

No. 25, in clause 5, page 5, leave out lines 7 to 17.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) moved the amendment in a powerful speech in the small hours of Friday morning. The Committee should not lose sight of what lies behind the amendments. They are neither probing nor wrecking. We will continue to pursue the argument that the Bill is fundamentally bad, that it will destroy and not build and that the Government are mistaken in their determination to ram it through. That, however, is not what the amendments are about.

The amendments are about putting right a grievous wrong and a grievous breach of trust. I confess that, when the Government Chief Whip moved the Adjournment of the Committee in the small hours of Friday morning, I hoped in my naivety that the purpose was to allow Ministers to reconsider the position that they had adopted and to come back to the Committee later say that they accepted the amendments and would agree to our proposals. If the Minister is willing to make it clear that

that is the case, I will gladly sit down, but it appears that the Government have not taken the opportunity of a few days' cool reflection to do that. That is the course of honour, but they have decided not to pursue it.

Why does the amendment matter? Let us remind ourselves what is at stake. The assisted places scheme was properly extended to include children younger under 11. Larger numbers of children now hold assisted places and attend independent junior schools through the benefit of assisted places.

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Byers): The reason we sought the Adjournment of the House last Thursday was that an agreement had been reached with Conservative Members that today's proceedings would be timetabled and completed at 10 pm.

Mr. Maude: I have no knowledge of any agreements made through the usual channels. If the Minister is threatening another guillotine motion so that the Government can again railroad the Committee, that is a different matter. I had hoped that he was pursuing the course of honour and reconsidering the Government's dishonourable position of seeking to break a pre-election pledge.

I return to my theme. In opposition, the Labour party threatened to abolish the whole scheme. Those engaged in the independent junior sector wrote, as is their entitlement, to the then Labour spokesman to inquire how that would apply to children in independent junior schools who had the benefit of assisted places. The answer they got in the first instance was unclear.

Cautiously and sensibly, the chairman of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools sought and got clarification. It is not as though the letter that I shall cite was poorly drafted, or dashed off on the back of an envelope. It was a considered letter sent by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), which makes a very specific pledge.

The pledge was essentially that any child in an independent junior school with the benefit of an assisted place would continue to have the benefit of it until the normal age of transfer out of independent junior schools, which is typically 13. For greater accuracy and the avoidance of doubt, I quote the letter, which states:

"Much will obviously depend on the school to which the child has been admitted. If a child has a place at a school which runs to age 13, then that place will be honoured through to 13."

I have examined the letter carefully to find whether there are any clues as to why that pledge should not be honoured in the legislation. I found no clues; it is a clear pledge. The only possible clue is that the letter is dated 1 April. The Government may mount the defence that it was an April fool and never meant to be taken seriously.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Does my right hon. Friend think that the fact that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) was not appointed to a ministerial position in the Department for Education and Employment suggests that the Government thought that they could, by that sleight-of-hand, slide out of the commitment that he had made on behalf of the Labour party and, therefore, one would assume, the Government? Does my right hon. Friend think that that washes as an excuse?

Mr. Maude: It is not for me to give an explanation. The only inference that we can draw is that the hon. Member for Walton gave a public pledge, in honour, and that the Government cynically, knowing that the pledge was to be dishonoured, chose to sideline him into the murky depths of the Cabinet Office, where he co-exists with the Minister without Portfolio.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): On Second Reading, I made it clear on behalf of the Government that we would use discretion if circumstances were appropriate, but that we could not give a carte blanche on the primary or prep school assisted places scheme, which will be introduced from September. We could not say that it would apply universally to people who, presumably before this year's tranche of assisted places, could take up the scheme only from the secondary school point of entry. The hot air that is being described this afternoon and was described into the early hours of last Friday morning is, frankly, bizarre given the key pledges that we have made, on the record, about protecting the interests of those children who were in assisted places—I stress the word "were"—through to this summer.

Mr. Maude: I will come to that, because I intend to deal with what the right hon. Gentleman said on Second Reading. It is important and demands to be considered in detail.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South–West Norfolk): Clearly, this is a matter of concern. The Secretary of State said that discretion would be used. I wonder whether he has any comment on a letter that I have here from the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett) to a Mrs. Brookes in connection with the education of her son, aged 10. This letter is dated 27 February and states:

"You were rightly concerned about possible disruption to your child's education. David Blunkett's office have confirmed that Labour will honour those existing places which have already been given. Your child will not be forced to move school."

I assume that that is one child in respect of whom discretion has already been exercised.

Mr. Maude: Time will tell. It is important for the Committee to hear the different ways in which the pledge has already been given, so that it can judge the extent of the breach of trust that we are talking about.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): Before the Secretary of State gets too far away with trying to fudge that pledge, may I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to what is said in the letter that was sent out to head teachers about the extent of the discretion to which the Secretary of State referred? That letter states:

"There is provision for the Secretary of State to exercise limited discretion to extend support under the scheme in exceptional circumstances."

Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is not much of a fig leaf there?

Mr. Maude: Again, I will discuss the way in which the Secretary of State sought on Second Reading and today to justify that breach of trust. My hon. Friend makes exactly the right point. The terms in which that pledge was put in a letter shows that the discretion will not be wide ranging. The fact that it will be used in "exceptional circumstances" shows exactly the reverse.

Mr. Blunkett: I object strongly to the notion that there has already been a breach of trust when the measure has not

[Mr. Blunkett]

yet been implemented. I must make it clear to the right hon. Gentleman, for whom I have some respect, that the pledges on the incoming prep and primary school assisted places, which the outgoing Government forced through the House, and the old secondary school places, which assured people—perfectly reasonably in my view—that we would not take away their places under that pre-dated scheme, are being combined.

The two are being put together, and hon. Members are trying to make an intellectual case that anyone taking up a place from September, prior to the age of 11 and going through to 13, should automatically be able to carry it forward. One cannot have it both ways—one cannot retrospectively pick up a pre-11 situation that did not exist and apply it to the secondary school level.

3.45 pm

Mr. Maude: This will not do. The Secretary of State has spoken kindly of me and I shall return the compliment. I do not believe that the right hon. Gentleman is a dishonourable man, and I do not believe that he would deliberately put his reputation as a man of honour at stake. I urge him, even at this stage, to take the provision away to think about it. I regret to have to tell the Committee that the right hon. Gentleman is wriggling; he is seeking to disentangle himself from a pledge made in the clearest possible terms.

The Government did not have to make that pledge; they could have justified their position by saying, "No, we are sorry. If your child has an assisted place at a junior school, it must finish at 11; we do not care if that causes you hardship or if it disrupts plans that you as parents have made—that is just tough." That would have been a harsh decision, but it would have been an honourable position to have taken. It is dishonourable to have made the pledge in such specific terms and then to break it.

I urge the Secretary of State to turn his mind to the matter. The words are not capable of misinterpretation. The pledge was made in the plainest terms and, in the plainest terms, the legislation breaches it.

I shall return in a moment to the way in which the Secretary of State unsuccessfully sought to disentangle himself from the pledge on Second Reading.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does my right hon. Friend agree that what we are seeing is proof positive that the Labour party was prepared to promise anything and to tell people what they wanted to hear before the election, only to break the promises within a few weeks? We could not trust what the Labour party said before the election; in government, they are breaking their promises very quickly.

Mr. Maude: We Conservatives raise the issue much more in sorrow than in anger, although anger is amply justified. I shall return to the general point that my hon. Friend raised, as it is important and goes to the heart of the basis on which the Government were elected.

I shall now turn to the way in which the Secretary of State sought to extricate himself on Second Reading. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) asked a question that went to the core of the debate and the amendments. He said:

"Why is the Secretary of State going back on that pledge in clause 2 and finishing education at the age of 11? Is it not the clearest example of a breach of promise?"

The Secretary of State replied using terms similar to those that he has used today. He said:

"I am very clear, and so is the Bill, that assisted places will remain in primary education up to the normal age of transfer at 11. Where an alternative transfer age applies in that area, the Secretary of State will have discretion, and my ministerial team and I will use it wisely to ensure that we do not have a situation where 500,000 youngsters transfer at 11, but other people think that they can transfer at 13, even if 13 is not the normal transferable age in that locality."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. 27.]

It is abundantly clear from what the Secretary of State said then, from what he has said today and from the letter that the Department has sent out and from which my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere quoted a little earlier, that the Government have no intention of using the discretion contained in the Bill to give effect to the pledge made before the election.

If there is an interpretation to be put on what the Secretary of State said, it is that, where the state system of education in a particular locality allows for the transfer of children aged 12 from a middle school to a secondary school, as happens in some areas, discretion may be used to allow the assisted place to continue until age 12. We welcome that measure, which we think is a good one, but we think that it should not be left to discretion. The Secretary of State and his team invite us to place our trust in their wisdom and discretion. The Secretary of State may ask us to trust him, but we may not feel as disposed to do so as we did before this legislation.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I come fresh to the debate on the amendment, and it seems to me that the Secretary of State's remarks about the normal age of transfer must mean the age of transfer within the state sector only and have no relevance to the normal arrangements for transfer of primary and secondary school children in the private sector. Is that my right hon. Friend's interpretation?

Mr. Maude: Even when the words are examined carefully and in the most generous and charitable way, they bear no interpretation other than that which my hon. Friend places on them. However they are interpreted, they are bleakly at odds with the clear terms of Labour's pre-election pledge—what I might call the Walton pledge—which was given, somewhat ironically, on 1 April. We have clearly established that the Bill breaches that pledge.

It is also clear, and the silence of Ministers amplifies it, that the modest discretion in the Bill is not intended to be used to give effect in any meaningful sense to that pledge. The Government stand indicted, and, unless they move swiftly to rescue their reputation, they will stand convicted, of a grave breach of trust.

Labour made many reckless promises before the election which will be found increasingly difficult to keep, because they are contradictory in so many ways. The Government have made so many contradictory promises to so many groups that at some stage those contradictions will fall to be resolved and will be found incapable of resolution.

However, I do not think that the Government would, without reason and so early in their life, put their reputation so recklessly at risk. Therefore, we must seek an explanation of why the Government should so quickly go back on their word and so lamely attempt to defend it. The explanation lies at the heart of another contradiction between the pledges.

The justification for the Bill is that the savings from phasing out the assisted places scheme will be used to pay for reducing infant class sizes. As the Committee knows, we have questioned that and we think that the sums are nowhere near right. Much of the independent research confirms our view that the figures, as often happens with the Government's figures, simply do not add up. When we probe this sorry little saga, we find that the Government themselves are beginning to realise that the sums do not add up. They are beginning to see that they will not even get close to the savings they need from abolishing the assisted places scheme to pay for the reduction in class sizes that they promised.

What do the Government do about that? As so often, they go on the grab. They think, "Where else can we grab some money? Where can we find a soft target who will not complain too much and will not be able to fight back and defend himself? We shall go for the 11 and 12-year-olds who have the benefit of assisted places. What do promises matter? We shall get the extra savings in future years by grabbing back those assisted places."

Those places were given and accepted in good faith, but it seems not to matter that children's education was planned on the basis of the scheme, which was reinforced by Labour pledges when the party was in opposition. That matters nothing, and the Government will push it to one side because there is a little more money to be grabbed to try to make their figures add up.

I suspect that that was the reasoning in the minds of Ministers. That is why they have gone down the path of callously ignoring the pledge and disappointing the hopes and plans of real people. This is not a technical or academic argument; this is about people and children at a vulnerable age—children, almost by definition, from less advantaged homes, because if they were not from such homes, they would not be in receipt of an assisted place to begin with—whose hopes are being dashed cruelly and cynically.

I invite any of my right hon. and hon. Friends to volunteer an explanation as to why the Government should expose themselves to the contempt not only of the Committee but of the country by behaving in this way. It must be no more than this: the Government have realised what we have been telling them for so long—the sums do not add up. They will not be able to deliver the reduction in class sizes through the Bill and, therefore, they have used this provision in clause 2 to grab back a bit more and to go beyond what they said they would do. Frankly, nothing that we have heard goes any way to justify it.

Therefore, we have to look a little beyond the provision and make a case which I hope appeals to the decency in Ministers. I hope that the Committee will join Conservative Members in urging Ministers to take the provision away, even at this late stage, reconsider it and find out whether they can do a little to rehabilitate their reputation.

If the Prime Minister had applied his mind to the issue, he would be urging Ministers to do the same. He has made many remarks about trust and promises. If he understood that this saga was going on and that this breach of trust had taken place, I feel sure that he would intervene. Let us consider just what the Prime Minister said in the Loyal Address debate. Talking about the difference between the Labour Government and the Conservative party, he said:

"There will be one other difference. This Government will keep their promises."

He went on to say—recklessly, the Committee may think:

"Conservative Members find that an extraordinary proposition."—[*Official Report*, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 62.]

Well, we certainly do now, given that the first opportunity Ministers have to deliver on a promise, they break it. But it is not just on that that I rest my case and urge Ministers to take this provision away and redeem their reputation—or, failing that, that I urge the Committee to accept the amendments and restore some decency to the Bill. On 1 May, as reported in *The Independent*, the Prime Minister said:

"The promises we have made are specific".

I add in parenthesis: what could be more specific than the Walton pledge in the letter? He went on:

"and if we deliver on these, then I think we are entitled to trust. If we do not deliver on those, then we'll not be."

If Ministers do not respond positively to the amendments, they will have broken their promises, they will have betrayed the trust that has been put in them and their reputations will have been irredeemably damaged.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) bandied about the words "breach of trust" and "promise". I say to my Front-Bench team that our biggest, most important promise was that we would use the funds that would arise from the Bill to lower primary class sizes in state schools. There would certainly be a breach of trust if we accepted the amendments, as funds would be less likely to be obtained for schools. There is a straight difference of values and priorities.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid–Worcestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rowlands: I have scarcely started. The right hon. Member for Horsham developed his case at length.

I want briefly to say that, in relation to values and priority, there could be no greater contrast than that between the speech of the right hon. Member for Horsham and the one that I am about to make on behalf of schools in my constituency.

Mr. Maude: I am encouraged—well, discouraged really, but at least the hon. Gentleman is being honest about it. He admits that the reason for the provision is to grab back a little more money. What he is also saying is a little more bothersome: if the Government keep one promise, it does not matter if they break another one. That is exactly the point that we are making: they have made contradictory promises.

Mr. Rowlands: I am about to tell the right hon. Gentleman why I support the Bill, and why I shall vote against the amendment. I want to contrast the schools that I suspect he has been describing with a school in my area, whose current position illustrates the problems that face our community here and now. Parents, governors, children and teachers involved with primary schools in our community will face problems in September—

Mr. Luff: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

4 pm

Mr. Rowlands: No. I want to answer the case put by the right hon. Member for Horsham.

Let me describe to the Committee, and to Ministers in particular, what is happening to Cwmsyfiog primary school at this moment. The core group of governors are having to make decisions. They will have to sack, or lose, one member of the teaching staff. The school's 1996–97 resources budget is to be cut from £5,000 to zero, which means that there will be no money to spend on learning resources—not a penny. I wonder how many schools that Opposition Members have described—schools that they say will be affected by the Bill, and will have problems—face a nil increase in learning resources, or a learning resources budget of nil.

The core group will also have to cut the supply teacher budget by a further £2,000. The consequences of the reduction in the school's resources have been described vividly. Class sizes will rise: there will be 35 children in class III. I want to make this point to Ministers. While we hope that, at some future date, the Bill will provide resources that will make it possible to reduce primary school class sizes, we currently face the prospect of rising class sizes this September, and no doubt the following September. Ministers must address the crisis facing primary schools now and in the next year, before the provision of any funds that may derive from the Bill.

Mr. Forth: We note the hon. Gentleman's apparent support for the Bill. Is he aware that the Minister for School Standards, the hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), said in earlier debates—it is one of the few things he did say—that he did not expect any significant savings to result from the Bill, and hence did not expect any improvements in class sizes, until the year 2000? What has the hon. Gentleman to say about that?

Mr. Rowlands: That is the point that I am making. I welcome the resources that will be transferred: that will be a sensible redistribution of public finance and expenditure to support schools that are in desperate need, such as Cwmsyfiog primary school.

Mr. Luff *rose—*

Mr. Rowlands: I am answering the point made by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

What I am saying to Ministers is that the crisis is hitting us now, before those resources become available, because of the local government settlement made by the previous Government, which left education in smaller primary schools in a dreadful plight. I am describing to Ministers the problems that are arising now, in the hope that the funds will be provided as soon as possible and will not be further eroded by the host of amendments proposed by Opposition Members. If those amendments were accepted, the amounts would be less, and, I suspect, would take longer to reach primary schools such as Cwmsyfiog.

When Ministers deal with the White Paper that they are to publish, they will have to address the present crisis in our primary schools. That is a simple point, and it is my reason for opposing the amendments tabled by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and others.

Mr. Clappison: I listened with interest to the comments by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who spoke with some passion about a school in his constituency whose name I will not begin to attempt to pronounce. I appreciate that he and, no doubt, his constituents feel passionately about their schools, but I must say that I found his logic somewhat surprising.

He seemed to be saying that the only way in which the Government, with their massive majority, could honour their commitments and pledges to the hon. Gentleman's constituents was by breaking promises that they had made to others. I find that a hard line of argument to follow from this all-powerful Government, with their massive majority and their ability to do as they wish within the purview of policy in education.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): In as far as the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) was replying to the charge made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), one derived from his speech the impression that, under new Labour, the end will always justify the means.

Mr. Clappison: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. Notwithstanding my recent remarks, I do not want to be confrontational about this, because we understand that that is no longer the mode in which we should behave, and I am very concerned about being non-confrontational, being helpful and honouring promises, all of which, I understand, are important attributes and considerations of the present Government.

In the spirit of the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), I say that I hope that the Minister can think carefully about this, listen to the arguments and accept that it is a straightforward question of honouring a promise.

We have debated other aspects on Second Reading and in Committee, but the group of amendments that we are debating raises wider considerations than support for, or opposition to, the idea of assisted places. Even hon. Members who do not support the idea of assisted places will feel uneasy about those issues and may well wish to support the amendments, because this is very much a question of honouring promises.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) set the scene very effectively when the Bill was last considered in Committee, and dealt with the documentary evidence that is of concern in this case, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham has done. The key element is the promise that was made in the letter on 1 April—"the Walton promise", as it has been termed—by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), who was then the shadow Minister with responsibility for schools. He made that promise on 1 April to the chairman of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools—a shadow Minister, speaking about policy to the chairman of an important organisation, representing many children in preparatory education.

As has been made clear, there can be no way of quibbling over or fudging the terms in which the letter was phrased. The promise, freely given, is specific:

"If a child has a place at a school which runs to age 13, then that place will be honoured through to 13."

That is about as specific a promise as one could possibly have, and it is clearly given.

A parent, reading of or hearing of that promise through the chairman of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools, would think, "There is not much room for doubt there; I can act in reliance on that promise."

Mr. Boswell: Does my hon. Friend recall the remarks made by the, sadly late, Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, who was in his time the hon. Member for Liverpool, Huyton—not far from Walton? He once referred to something said in the House being not merely a lightly given promise, but a pledge. Should we not view the remark in the letter as being in that category?

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is right. It can be seen only as a pledge. It was given to the chairman of a large organisation, at an important time—1 April, only a few weeks before the general election—it related to a matter that had been the subject of considerable correspondence and discussion, which was of great interest to the chairman of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools, and it is about as clear as it could possibly be.

It would not be entirely surprising if parents acted on that pledge, regarding it as a cast-iron guarantee. Indeed, we understand from a later letter to the Secretary of State by the chairman of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools, complaining about what had taken place, that several parents may well have acted on it. The chairman quotes the words of the pledge given in the letter:

"if a child has a place at a school which runs to 13 then that place will be honoured through to 13"

and continues:

"On that basis we, in common with a large number of Preparatory schools, have offered places to 7 and 11-year—olds and although we have warned parents that the Assisted Place will terminate when their child is aged 13, we did not, of course, sound any cautionary note about termination at age 11."

Parents will have expected those places to be available for their children to age 13, because they had a cast-iron pledge from the Labour party that they would be available.

I remind Ministers that, after relying on the words and pledge of the Labour party, many parents made an important decision about their children's future education. Abolition of assisted places is a very serious subject for those parents. I invite the Minister to direct his attention to the issue and to realise its seriousness for those parents. I share those parents' concerns, because there are many assisted places in my constituency.

I appreciate that part of the Labour party's manifesto was elimination of the assisted places scheme, and I noticed that the scheme's abolition was one of the principal elements of the Queen's Speech. Therefore, on 15 May 1997, during the debate on the Loyal Address, I asked the Secretary of State for Education and Employment about Labour's pledge.

The Secretary of State gave no hint that any such breach of pledge would occur, and I was fortified and reassured by his words and by his attitude to assisted places and to the children in them. He said:

"During the general election campaign, I said that children who have been allocated places will be permitted to take them up. We shall legislate within weeks to ensure that schools do not abuse the licence that was given to them to look after the interests of children by agreeing to places for 1998 or 1999 onwards. The hallmark of this Government will be to put children before dogma. It will be to ensure that the interests of our children come first on every occasion."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 183.]

One week later, we discovered that those sentiments do not apply to the 2,000 or so children who have received assisted places to age 13. When I read the Bill and an accompanying letter of guidance to headmasters in schools offering assisted places, I was surprised to find that places would not be available to 13 but would end at 11. My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham was right to mention the response that I received from the Secretary of State in the debate on the Bill's Second Reading. The Secretary of State said:

"I am very clear, and so is the Bill, that assisted places will remain in primary education up to the normal age of transfer at 11. Where an alternative transfer age applies in that area, the Secretary of State will have discretion, and my ministerial team and I will use it wisely to ensure that we do not have a situation where 500,000 youngsters transfer at 11, but other people think that they can transfer at 13, even if 13 is not the normal transferable age in that locality. It would not do the children a favour if we pretended that we could do that. Discretion is the better part of valour, and we will use it wisely."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1992; Vol. 295, c. 27.]

If one reads the words in the Department's letter to headmasters alongside the Secretary of State's words about his discretion and how he will use it wisely, it becomes clear that—as my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham quite properly and appropriately said—that discretion will be very limited. The letter describes

"limited discretion to extend support under the scheme in exceptional circumstances".

That limited discretion apparently will apply only when the normal transfer age in the state sector is 13 and there is a system of middle schools. The discretion will therefore apply only to a very narrow range of pupils, and it demonstrates a great diminution of the Government's unconditional pledge to all children in assisted places that should last to age 13.

I have studied the Secretary of State's words in the Second Reading debate, and I appreciate the reason that he gave for his decision. The question, however, is one not so much of the reasons of the Secretary of State—or of whoever took the decision—in making the decision, but of whether the decision was justified. People who break promises have reasons for doing so, and the question is whether they are justified in doing so. In studying this decision, I find it very hard to find any possible justification for the Secretary of State's proposals.

Is it the case that, since 1 April, circumstances have arisen which have made it impossible for the Secretary of State to carry out the pledge he gave? That is not the case. Is there any change at all in the circumstances? No. Have facts come to light which were not known to the Labour party when it gave the pledge and which put quite a different complexion on matters? No. That is an important point, because all the factors that the Secretary of State has given as reasons for not honouring the pledge were ones that he and his colleagues must have known of when the pledge was given on 1 April. Nothing new has come to light; these are all matters that are well known to the Government.

I am sure that, for the Minister of State, who has long experience of education, these matters are ABC matters. He and his team would have been perfectly well aware of all the circumstances when the decision was made on 1 April and when the pledge was given. If they knew of

[Mr. Clappison]

those matters then and decided to go ahead and give the pledge, they should now keep it, because there is no justification for not doing so.

4.15 pm

Since the Secretary of State spoke on 2 June, some discretion seems to have been used by him. Indeed, he seems to have taken at face value his comment about discretion being the better part of valour because he used his discretion when the head of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools wrote to him by not responding to the letter. He left it to a civil servant to respond. I will not go into what the civil servant said in that letter; I think that it is gobbledegook and does not take the matter any further. The original letter was written to the Secretary of State and I am a bit surprised—I do not want to criticise the Secretary of State too much because I am trying to get him and the Minister of State on my side—that he was not prepared to reply to it himself.

Before the election, the Labour party and its spokesmen were keen to correspond and communicate with those whose children were in independent education. I understand that the hon. Member for Walton—I give him credit for this—attended the conference of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools. He wrote numerous letters to that organisation on matters that might be of concern to it and he even wrote an article for one of the independent school's magazines, which was headed "Now is the opportunity to build bridges and forget the divisions". I do not want to be too confrontational, but I must say that all that has happened so far is that the Labour party, through the Bill, has created divisions and forgotten its promises. That is what this amounts to.

When the Minister of State wound up the debate on Second Reading, he chose to ignore the matter altogether. No doubt the Secretary of State would say that he was using his discretion wisely. The hon. Member for Walton, the then shadow Minister, who made the original promise, has been moved on to other things. The Secretary of State does not want to answer correspondence on the matter. The Minister of State tries to ignore it altogether when he speaks in the House. We see at an early stage in this Government's life a decision that has become an orphan, one of those unfortunate decisions by Government which travel from in-tray to in-tray without anyone wanting to take responsibility for them. It is a sad little decision and it is sad that it should have been made so early in the life of this Government.

It is incumbent on Labour Members and particularly on Ministers to accept that there is a question of trust and promise. The promise was given in the clearest possible terms to the low-income parents of 2,000 or so children who were very concerned about their future and who wanted to make the best decision for them. Those parents will be very interested by the approach taken by Ministers on this occasion.

I must say to the Under-Secretary of State that parents will not want to hear too much of the refrain we heard the other evening—that we are the many and they are the few, so we can do what we like. That refrain should not be used on this occasion. I would like Ministers to look again at the matter and to show that they can be flexible. I would also like them to show that on the important matter of honouring promises, they are prepared to face up to their responsibilities.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham was right when he referred to the Prime Minister's words. Those words about trust and keeping promises stand in contrast with what the Government propose to do now. Surely the amendments give the Government an opportunity to find a way out of the dilemma in which they have got themselves. It should not take too much for the Government, riding high, with their massive majority and enormous power, to stop and think about honouring pledges made to a few parents from low-income families. Surely the Government have the wisdom, discretion and sense to recognise their plight.

It is an important issue, and I hope that the Government will not act in a confrontational way, but use their discretion and their power. I hope that they will reconsider the matter and show that they are sensitive to keeping promises to parents who regard the education of their children as, in the Secretary of State's words, of paramount importance.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I begin by saying that the Liberal Democrats support amendment No. 3 and, with your indulgence, Sir Alan, we will call for a separate vote on it.

Given the enormous amount of rhetoric that we have heard from Conservative Members, it seems incredible that they did not manage to table one sensible, composite amendment. Instead, on Thursday they chose to spend the entire evening filibustering so that we could not have a sensible debate on the key issues.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Willis: No. I have only just begun my speech.

Mr. Luff: On a point of order, Sir Alan. Can you confirm that the Bill is likely to make substantially faster progress in the House than it would have in Standing Committee and to accuse us of filibustering is a remarkable and possibly disorderly suggestion?

The Chairman: I cannot imagine that any of my colleagues in the Chair during the proceedings on Thursday would have allowed any conduct of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We shall make more progress if we get on with the substantial points.

Mr. Willis: I humbly apologise for the use of the term "filibustering". Perhaps it just took an incredibly long time for Conservative Members to speak.

On Thursday, the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) referred to my involvement in education. I thank him for his kind remarks and I return the compliment. Clearly, the hon. Gentleman has a great commitment to seeing the Bill squashed and particular aspects of it reversed.

Oddly enough, I rise today in support of his amendment, but I do so with an extremely heavy heart. One of my principal desires in coming to the House was to redress some of the damage that the previous Government had inflicted on state education through their pernicious attacks based almost entirely on dogma and

division. Having listened to some of the seven-hour debate on Thursday, and having heard Conservative Members arguing in defence of a scheme that, in many ways, was the very embodiment of the divisions of the past 18 years, I am now placed in the invidious position of having to warn the present Government against making the same mistakes.

Indeed, my party supports the amendment because we want to put an end to injustice based on division. If the amendment is not carried today, that legacy of division and mistrust will continue. If the Government insist on ending the assisted places scheme for all children at the age of 11, they will stand accused, quite rightly in our view, of placing dogma before reason and expediency before compassion.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton–Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Given his previous experience in education, does he agree that the only important issue is continually raising standards? Does he consider that the Bill does anything at all to raise standards in the state education system?

Mr. Willis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to confirm that, over the past 18 years, the previous Government made a pernicious attack on state education in the name of standards. When Conservative Members attack the Government for the pernicious way in which they have introduced the Bill, that seems to be perfectly okay, but when the compliment is reversed by those of us who are committed to state education and not private, independent education, we are told that we are quite ridiculous.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: No, I will not.

I am dismayed that Conservative Members, who spoke so eloquently on Thursday and put on such mock shows of outrage and injustice, failed to recognise that the assisted places scheme did absolutely nothing for the vast majority of Britain's children, particularly when resources were in such short supply. What logic is there in an argument that states a desire to raise standards for all, yet deliberately sets out to disadvantage those in the greatest need by removing resources from them? Yet, that is exactly what the assisted places policy did and why it is monstrous for hon. Members to try to continue to justify such an unjustifiable policy.

Earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Mid–Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) spoke of his experience during the election campaign of hundreds of people rushing up to him to express their anguish at the possible ending of the assisted places scheme. I did not have that experience once.

What I did encounter in virtually every household where there was a school-aged child was a deep concern that further Government cuts would mean yet larger primary school classes, yet further delays in urgent building repairs, yet more need for parental contributions to music and swimming lessons and the purchase of text books, and the cancellation of capital programmes. That is what they were concerned about and what they rushed up to me to talk about—not the ending of the assisted places scheme.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): The only person who came to me during the election campaign to raise anxieties about the assisted places scheme was someone who asked whether their child would be able to remain in the scheme until the age of 13, which is the transfer age and the objective of the amendment that my hon. Friend is supporting.

Mr. Willis: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention.

The assisted places scheme is not an issue in my constituency because we have an education system in which every school is a good school, where every school achieves at or above national standards, and where every school has rejected the siren calls of the previous Secretary of State to opt out and cause further division. We want high quality, high-value-added education for all, not simply a few.

Yes, we have two excellent independent schools, which have a total of 71 assisted places. Their examination results are on a par with the comprehensives, and their sporting and music traditions are also strong. Indeed, apart from two key components, they offer a comparable standard of education to the state comprehensives. The first is that in neither of the two independent schools—we have not heard this mentioned once in the debate—does one find one special educational needs pupil on an assisted place. Yet, in the six comprehensives, there are 854 such pupils.

The second factor is the element of grant that is received from the state—

The Chairman: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Member, but I ought to point out that he is making a rather general speech, whereas we are discussing specific amendments, which, as I understood it, he particularly wished to support and to which his right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) sought elegantly to guide him back. May I recommend that he follows that guidance?

Mr. Willis: As always, Sir Alan, I am grateful for your guidance. As a new hon. Member, I was modelling myself on Conservative Members.

4.30 pm

Mr. Maude: On a point of order, Sir Alan. It is reasonable for the Chairman and Conservative Members to take strong exception to that remark. We have been at pains to address ourselves properly to the amendments under debate. If we had not done so, you and your colleagues in the Chair would have brought us up short.

The Chairman: I do not think that we are out of order. The point has registered that we should make progress on the specific matter of the amendment. Then the whole Committee would be more satisfied.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful for your guidance, Sir Alan. I am trying to balance the amendment with the overall structure that the Government are trying to address through the Bill.

[Mr. Willis]

When he paid me his compliment on 2 May, the hon. Member for Hertsmere might not have known that I had just finished a 34-year teaching career, all spent in state schools in some of the most deprived areas of Leeds and Middlesbrough. For the last 20 years of that career, I was a head teacher and for the last 13, I was head teacher of John Smeaton community high school—a comprehensive school in the constituency of Leeds, East.

That school served one of the most disadvantaged areas of Leeds, where unemployment was twice the average for the city, with a particular problem among 16 to 25-year-olds. Approximately one child in three came from a lone-parent family and housing stock was relatively poor, but the school was oversubscribed, with excellent reports, no failing teachers and a dedicated, committed staff. Many of the parents of children at that school could not spell assisted places scheme, let alone use it. Very few students from one of the most deprived areas of east Leeds attended private schools on assisted places.

Those students are failing not because they lack dedicated teachers or caring homes, but because they live in a spiral of deprivation—a legacy of 18 years of Tory education policy. They need high-quality early years education. They need a real commitment to reducing primary school class sizes, because teachers working with children already damaged by their social environment at the age of five need to be able to give high levels of personal contact—the contact that preparatory schools give to many children.

The Liberal Democrats would like more than the money from the assisted places scheme spent on redressing the balance. I know that Ministers would dearly love to have the £2 million a year that the Liberal Democrats would have put at the disposal of the Department, but the measure is a start.

Mr. Luff: Two billion.

Mr. Willis: Two billion. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his alacrity.

Despite my party's desire for the assisted places scheme to go quickly, we must not take advantage of a group of children, sacrificing them on the altar of expediency. The Education (Assisted Places) (Amendment) Regulations 1996 extended the assisted places scheme to junior departments of independent schools. Of the 850 places, 790 were taken up in 1996–97. Many such schools teach to the age of 13. It would be morally unjustifiable to remove those children in the middle of their education and return them to the state sector.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a further complication in local education authorities that operate a middle school system? In those areas, children will be put back into the system halfway through what would have been their middle school career. Does my hon. Friend agree that that should be addressed in the Bill?

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is difficult for the Library to obtain up-to-date figures. In 1995, 33 local education authorities—virtually one in three—had middle school systems. In the Minister's constituency, there are at least two different ages of transfer. Children in preparatory schools would find it difficult because their education would be halted at the age of 11 and they would have to rejoin the state system, not at the beginning, but in the middle of a different tier and a different style of education. That is unacceptable.

Section 2 of the Education Act 1997 allowed independent primary schools that were not attached to independent secondary schools to offer some 600 assisted places. Those places have been largely allocated for 1997-98. It would not be fair or just to allow those children in preparatory schools to be taken out of their education in midstream.

The point made by the shadow Minister about the oral and written commitments made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) to the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools was well made, and I do not wish to repeat it. However, it adds considerable weight to the arguments for the amendments. It must be wrong for a shadow Minister to promise one thing in opposition and then for his colleagues to renege when in power. We saw enough of that under the previous Administration, and we do not want to see it again.

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment, in his opening remarks to the House on 2 June, tried to address that point when he made his famous statement:

"Discretion is the better part of valour, and we will use it wisely."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. 27.]

Unlike many Opposition Members, I believe that the Secretary of State will use his judgment wisely. The amendments seek to remove the shadow of concern from parents by making the appropriate changes to the Bill. I hope that the Minister will accept the amendments and demonstrate that, unlike with the previous Administration, all children come first with the Government.

Mr. Luff: I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) on his latter remarks. He is right to express the hope that the discretion available to the Government under the Bill will be used wisely. We know that it will not be the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who exercises the discretion; in practice, it is likely to be the Under–Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris). She can be relied upon to use her discretion wisely, and I hope that she will prove that when she responds to the debate on the amendments.

It is a shame that we are considering the amendments and moving to the Report stage later today. Issues are raised by the amendments that do not conflict with the principles that guide the Government in their consideration of the Bill. They could usefully reflect on those issues and come back to the House with sensibly worded amendments. I understand that the Government cannot accept the amendments, because of drafting errors. That is often the case with Opposition amendments. I have sat on the other side of the Chamber and witnessed sensible amendments tabled by the Labour party in opposition that we could not accept because they were badly drafted. I accept that the amendments may have technical problems, but I cannot see any reason why the spirit that lies behind many of the amendments cannot be accepted by the Government.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough made a powerful and unanswerable case on the specific issue of transfers at age 13. The hon. Gentleman chastised us for speaking at length earlier in proceedings on the Bill. I cannot speak for my hon. Friends—although I hope that they have the same experience as myself—but I spoke on the amendments because I genuinely care about them. The Bill is being passed very speedily and I hope that the Minister will consider our arguments later, when she reads the *Official Report*. I understand that she will not be able to respond positively today, but I hope that detailed consideration will be given to our amendments in another place. They raise the most important issues of trust without interfering with the principle that guides the Government.

I spoke twice last week on the Bill and I made no secret of the fact that I think it is a bad Bill. It is misguided and I do not believe that it will save money. It will not achieve what the Government want it to achieve; rather, it will damage the education system and bring no benefit. However, I am faced with the challenge of mitigating its worst effects, and I believe that the amendments would achieve that.

The speeches that we have heard so far have mostly concentrated on the issue of transfer at age 13. I am not aware of any individuals in my constituency who are affected by that matter, although I suspect that there are some. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough teased me about the "hundreds" of parents who approached me on the general matter raised by the Bill. There were not hundreds, but it may have run into double figures—[HON. MEMBERS: "Twelve?"] I would not like to give an exact number, but it was well into double figures. That is quite a lot of people to raise a matter on the doorstep during an election campaign.

There are specific individuals in my constituency who are touched by the issues raised by the amendments; so I speak from a hard realistic point of view, not a hypothetical one, about individuals who will be badly affected if that aspect of the Bill is passed unamended.

I shall address in particular the transfer at the age of 11 from primary education into the so-called secondary sector, because that is the issue that touches individuals in my constituency. As I have said before, although the schools affected lie not in my constituency but in Worcester, many of the parents of children who attend them come from my Mid-Worcestershire constituency.

A characteristic of those schools is the strong link between their primary and secondary provision. For example, one of them has a shared Department for Education and Employment number and sees itself as one school, which children join at seven and leave at 18. It is organised in two separate units, with two head teachers, but it sees itself as a continuum, and seeks to encourage its pupils to see their position within the school in the same spirit.

That fact has important implications for the amendments. The encouragement of such a spirit makes a valuable contribution to the life of a school. Another Worcester school that the children of my constituents attend transfers pupils a year early from the primary school—that is, from the physical primary facility—to the secondary school. The children regard themselves as part of the secondary school at the age of 10 rather than 11.

I know about that, because my daughter attends the school and has made that transfer. When the children move across, they feel part of the secondary school a year early. I strongly suspect, although I do not know for sure, that the same considerations exist elsewhere—DFEE numbers, and so on, and certainly the encouragement of one spirit across the school, and the strong bonds of loyalty between the two separate units.

The issues involved are more complex than the Government realised when they drafted that part of the Bill. That is why I hope that they will respond positively, at least in tone, to the amendments. Integration of primary and secondary facilities in the schools is important, and deserves to be taken seriously by the Government.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) spoke about the "Walton promise", and quoted from a letter. I have not seen the letter, but I heard what he said, and he made a powerful case. Moreover, head teachers from the schools that I have mentioned tell me that, at the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools national conference in September 1996, they heard similar comments by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), who is now the Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service, but was then a shadow education spokesman.

4.45 pm

The head teachers cannot provide me with an exact copy of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but they are quite clear about the implication that he encouraged them to draw from what he said—that assisted places would be honoured for their lifetime. That means that, when a child goes to a preparatory school, the assisted place lasts the whole time the child is at that school. That relates to the question about 13-year-olds raised by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough.

The head teachers were also clear about the fact that, in schools that regarded themselves as single entities—one school in effect and, indeed, legally—assisted places would be honoured for their lifetime, from seven to 18. That is what they believed the hon. Member for Walton was saying last September.

I do not believe that accepting the principle behind the amendments would be a huge problem for the Government. The numbers involved are modest and time-limited. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) said that he passionately believed that the amendments would strike at the primary school in his constituency that was suffering so badly, in its efforts to improve. I am sorry to hear about that suffering, but I sought to intervene to ask the hon. Gentleman whether he knew exactly what the cost implications would be if the Government accepted the principle behind the amendments.

I suspect that the sums are very small, and that by the time they are shared out throughout the whole state primary sector, they will be nugatory—almost non-existent. I believe that the savings that could be made by the whole Bill will be much smaller than the Government claim, and I have tabled a question seeking clarification on the matter.

Mr. Forth: You'll be lucky.

Mr. Luff: My right hon. Friend on the Front Bench thinks that I will be lucky to get an answer. Certainly that

[Mr. Luff]

has been a characteristic of questions asked about the Bill—and that is one of the factors that makes scrutiny of it, in the dreadful rush that the Government have inflicted on us, so difficult.

I believe that the overall savings will be small, but the savings made by not accepting the amendments must be tiny. I asked one of the schools in my constituency how many assisted places it had, and the answer was that five had been awarded for seven and eight-year-olds in September 1996, and another five had been awarded for this September. In the case of that school, those places will be honoured through to the age of 11 and then scrapped.

I cannot believe that those numbers will be replicated across the country at anything like that level, because the schools concerned happen to have a long tradition of state provision. One was a direct grant school and another a grammar school. In effect, they were almost in the state sector; one literally was a state school.

Those schools tend to attract rather more assisted place applicants, because in the community they serve they are seen as state schools—glorified state schools, possibly, but none the less state schools—and many parents aspire to send their children there. The numbers involved are therefore likely to be at the top end of the spectrum, yet they are still extremely modest.

I have given the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Yardley, the text of a letter to me from a constituent whose child will be affected by this part of the Bill. I asked the mother concerned whether I could name her and her child, but she was reluctant to be named, and asked me to quote her letter anonymously. I shall therefore change the text slightly as I read, to take account of her wish to remain anonymous. However, I have given the Minister a copy of the letter, so she will be able to see exactly what my constituent wrote.

The letter, which was sent to me last week, says:

"I am writing to you in desperation to ask for your help in preventing the Government from cancelling the existing Junior School assisted places. My child . . . won a full place to the . . . school . . . last September.

Before the election the Labour party Education spokesman went on public record as saying that all existing Assisted places would be honoured. Now they appear to be breaking this promise.

We are distraught at the prospect of my child losing her education when the older Assisted places are being left in peace. I have no money to pay fees and I am desperate to do the best for my child.

Please advise me what to do, there must be many other parents in the constituency in a similar position . . . I enclose a letter I have sent to the Prime Minister".

The letter that my constituent wrote to the Prime Minister reads as follows:

"I am writing to beg you to reconsider your policy on removing existing Assisted places from Junior School children. My child won a place to the . . . school . . . in September 1996 and we were impressed when your Education spokesman, before the election, promised that all existing Assisted places would be honoured."

That is the nub of the debate—that promise made in terms, both explicitly and implicitly, by the hon. Member for Walton. The message was clearly received loud and clear by my constituent, whose letter continues:

"This now seems not to be the case and we are completely shattered that my child is to be punished for my child's wonderful achievement in gaining this place which was a passport to a better life.

I exist as a single parent on my small self-employed earnings and Family Credit, since my husband left. The stability and security of my child's promised education . . . meant everything to us.

My child is now distraught at the prospect of being torn away from a lovely school and friends, whilst the older Assisted Place children are left in peace, and I cannot justify it to my child.

I understand that there is a principle at stake here but I beg you as a parent of young children yourself, not to break a promise made to my child and to reconsider this policy and be magnanimous here."

That is the nub of the group of amendments. It is an appeal to the Government's generosity of spirit, an appeal to them to be magnanimous and live up to the trust that they said the electorate should repose in them—to govern for all the nation rather than respecting the tyranny of the majority.

I urge the Minister to reflect seriously on what my constituent says. I have no idea what the lady's political views are; I did not meet her on the doorstep during the election campaign, and she wrote to me only last week. She provides a powerful example of the kind of person who will be badly affected unless the Government accept the spirit of the amendments.

A range of solutions presents itself. The most obvious solution would be to accept the amendments—but the Government may be intent on rejecting them and the spirit that lies behind them. If so, I ask the Minister to give me a clear figure on the costs that would be involved in accepting them. If the sums are as small as I expect them to be—in a few years' time, they will be very small indeed—I can see no rationale for the Government digging in their toes and acting like a dog in the manger. There is no reason why they should resist such a straightforward case of humanitarian concern. The easiest course for the Government, therefore, would be to accept the amendments. Alternatively—a poor second best—the Government could state more clearly how generously they intend to use the discretion that the Bill will give them. I urge them to exercise that discretion wisely.

If nothing else, I urge the Minister to guarantee that the Prime Minister replies in person to my constituent, so that he is forced to give an account of why he believes the Government should break their pledge. If the Government accept the amendments, they will have a chance to prove that they do indeed put children before dogma.

Mr. Boswell: I welcome the chance to participate briefly in the debate, which I join only today—but already I have been appalled by what I have heard. I have been impressed by the force of the arguments deployed by my right hon. and hon. Friends and by the Liberal Democrat party. I need not detail the Committee by dilating on the general importance of Governments honouring their pledges unless and until there is a clear and specific reason for breaching them.

The principle in international law of pacta sunt servanda is that people who make undertakings should keep them. I find it disturbing that the Government, with the first education Bill of this Parliament—they have said that education is their priority—should slip up in this way.

I should like to reinforce the eloquent remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) about the human consequences of this measure. It is all very well saying that the numbers involved are small. There may be only 2,000 who fall into the category of the 13-year-old problem, although more

are included if we consider the primary and secondary sectors together. I thought that this House stood for the principle that one injustice to one person is an injustice too many. That is why I am troubled about the proposals.

I am, for instance, worried about the implications for parents, some of them single parents, and for children, many of whom entertained the reasonable and legitimate expectation of being able to stay at their current schools until such time as they would usually change schools. Now they find that that settled understanding is to be frustrated by an apparently capricious Act of Parliament.

As an only child, I attached great importance to the security of knowing where my schooling would continue at the next stage, if all went well. Family problems can exacerbate the insecurities. I well understand the technical issues described by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), because the same LEA, in my constituency and the adjoining one, administers a middle school system as well as the usual transfer at the age of 11. If a family with a child of 11 were breaking up, it would certainly benefit that child's education if he were allowed to stay on for another couple of years instead of being forced to move schools in the middle of the family breakdown. Unless there is good reason for doing so, it seems to me wrong to disturb the pattern of a child's education.

What could the reasons behind this proposed change be? Although I agreed with a great deal of what my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) said, I beg to differ with him over his interpretation of the amount that is supposed to be saved. On a rough calculation, I reckon that the 2,000 children associated with the 13-years-old problem might produce a saving equivalent to a couple of hours of primary school education throughout the country. That is so little as to be indistinguishable from background noise. Ministers cannot plausibly maintain that the Bill will transform the prospects of primary school children generally, so I cannot believe that a wish to save money was the real motivation behind the legislation.

A second, more likely, possibility was a concern to avoid artificial arrangements. When I was the Minister responsible for higher education, I discussed with officials the theoretical possibility in a fully integrated education system—perhaps within a single foundation—that a child entering primary school at the age of five might claim, on the basis that he was embarking on an integrated course of study leading in due course to the award of a first degree, that he was entitled to a mandatory award from the local education authority for the whole of that period. I suspect that the adept lawyers in the DFEE would have overturned that idea; but if the Government say that they want to implement an anti-avoidance measure, as the tax lawyers would call it, I can understand what they are about.

The Government may be worried about preparatory schools—I do not believe they are usually run in this spirit—so reordering their affairs to give certain children one or two more years of assisted places. If so, I have some sympathy for their point. If children usually leave a particular preparatory school at the age of 11, but that school then decides to keep them on for another couple of years in assisted places until the age of 13—after the decision to abolish the assisted places scheme—the Government would be on to a point. I do not, however, believe that such cases are typical at all.

We are talking about schools whose normal age of transfer is 13, even though that does not mirror the pattern of transfer in the maintained sector. The amendments try to reconcile the problem humanely.

Earlier, I invited my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham to agree with me, and I think he did, that, although the usual age of transfer is 11, in the state sector—12 in middle schools—in the private sector and in schools offering assisted places it is usually 13. That is not universal, but it is fairly common. There is a simple discrepancy; consequently, under the Bill a small but significant number of children—any number of children is significant—will be forced to move at 11 when they would usually expect to transfer at 13. That would be unfortunate. Perhaps 2,000 children, on the most restrictive calculations, have been expecting to make their transfers at that age.

I concede that, if the Government are seeking to avoid monkey business—people trying to distort or frustrate the intentions for which the Government have a mandate—they may need to deal with that in some way, but they should not stumble on consequences for a significant number of individuals that will force them to change schools before they would normally expect to do so. In other words, we need to reverse the burden of proof. If there is a normal pattern of transfer from an assisted places school to another or to the maintained sector, that should be honoured. That is consistent with the pledge given by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle).

I can see that there are difficulties in effecting that. Some of my hon. Friends have referred to the importance of having a flexible interpretation of the regulations, which we have not yet seen. I agree in principle, but I must warn the Committee that, although it is important that regulations be interpreted flexibly, they cannot simply have a coach and horses driven through them, to allow for every single situation.

5 pm

What worries me about the way in which the legislation is framed is that it would be difficult in law—I am no lawyer, but I have some experience in these matters—to provide for everything to be at the Secretary of State's discretion. That might appear to be a tidy way of dealing with everything, but I have a horrible feeling that it is not reliable for the families involved, because discretion cannot be unlimited, however good the draftsman.

There is a human problem for a small but significant number of pupils and their families. In my view, it is because of the dissonance between the normal age of transfer in the maintained sector and that in the private sector and assisted places. The legislation must be considered in terms of that specific problem.

It would be possible to come up with a solution, along the lines of amendment No. 3, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), that preserves people's normal expectation for transfer and, as a safeguard or fallback, prevents people from distorting or frustrating the Government's intentions. The Government should therefore either accept the amendments or undertake to cover the point in another way.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend makes a helpful analysis. I invite him to consider the important point that

[Mr. Clappison]

in every case it is the parents who have decided that it is in the best interests of their child's education for it to continue until 13.

Mr. Boswell: My hon. Friend is a lawyer, and I am not. I may have appeared to be arguing the legal side—that is important—but I must emphasise the importance of the human side as well. We simply cannot afford—however much we want to do for the maintained sector or for anyone else—to ride roughshod over a small number of individuals, in pursuit of a principle that is in itself questionable, and on the back of pledges that ought to be undertaken and maintained.

Mr. Hawkins: I want to reinforce some of the points made in powerful speeches by my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) and my hon. Friends the Members for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), for Mid–Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison).

Many parents have contacted me about this matter. Last weekend, I was approached by a mother who said that she had grave reservations about the likely effect of the Bill on her daughter if the new Government do not accept the amendments. She said that the Prime Minister's "education, education, education" should be replaced by "broken promise, broken promise, broken promise". I hope that Labour Members will bear that in mind.

If the Government do not accept the amendments or a modified version of them, that will be a gross breach of trust. There can be no getting away from the unequivocal words of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) in a speech to the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools conference and his subsequent letters.

Ministers know that those words were unequivocal, and they cannot weasel out of them. If they do not accept the amendments, they will be guilty, within a few weeks of taking office, of breaking their first promise, on an issue that the Prime Minister has said is the most important to him as a parent and as a Prime Minister.

I have some experience of the preparatory school world. Some years ago, I taught in a preparatory school for a relatively short time. That school, let me tell the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), had children with special needs and made an excellent job of teaching them. I was fortunate enough to play a part in giving extra remedial teaching to some of those pupils. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support and his acceptance of the need to keep the promises made by Labour Front Benchers; he clearly has enormous personal experience of education.

My father was a university don at both the beginning and the end of his career, and my mother was a teacher at an independent girls' school—she was head of the mathematics department for many years and eventually became the headmistress—that also benefited from assisted places at the preparatory level and dealt with special needs children, so I know the importance of the matter to parents who are often on low incomes. If the Labour party, with its huge majority, is not prepared to start keeping promises made to parents only a few weeks ago, it will stand condemned in the years ahead.

It is important to consider the detail of the amendments. None of my hon. Friends has yet spoken in detail about amendment No. 28, which emphasises the importance of

"religious content . . . the curriculum provided . . . opportunities for sport . . . size of classes; and . . . single-sex provision".

Such factors explain why parents on low incomes often choose the special facilities that the independent sector at preparatory level can provide.

The Government are going back to the bad old ways of the 1960s and 1970s, when they were hellbent on destroying good direct-grant schools, such as the one that I attended having won a free place on the 11-plus. They are acting on the same old doctrinaire belief that if not all can have, none shall have. That old Labour ideology permeates the new Government's rejection of the amendments.

The matter is of enormous importance to the parents involved. I hope that the Government will reflect further. If they do not, I promise them that, over the next five years, in the eyes—and the words—of many parents, they will live to regret it.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): In the debate so far, my right hon. and hon. Friends have adopted a generous approach towards the Government, as did the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis). I shall try to follow that example, because I hope that we all agree that the key issue is the children and families who will be affected if the amendments are not accepted. Parents accepted assisted places for their children in good faith, in the expectation that they would be permitted to carry on to the age of 13 and not have their education disrupted, as it will be if the Bill is not amended.

I echo the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Mid–Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), and urge the Government to listen carefully to the genuine concerns that have been expressed this afternoon. If they cannot accept the amendments, they should at least accept that they need to resolve the problem and table new amendments in another place.

Parents accepted places for their children in good faith because the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) promised that places would be honoured through to the age of 13. The promise was made on 1 April; I cannot imagine that he made it in the belief that there was no chance of his party forming a Government after the general election. Had he done so, one might question his bona fides and integrity in one sense, but we would have understood it more than we do in the circumstances that now apply. I think that he made the promise believing that his party would honour it in government and that people who acted on it could have faith in what the Government would do.

I ask the Government to consider seriously our concerns and to think more widely about how their approach to the Bill will set the tone of this Government. I think that this is the first legislation to go through this Parliament that will have an immediate impact on people. There is no doubt that if the Government do not accept our amendments, they will be guilty of a breach of trust. After all, during the general election campaign, the

Labour party claimed that it was fighting on the issue of trust. It said that it was the party that could be trusted and that it would honour its pledges and manifesto commitments. Both the Bill in general and the specific provisions about the continuation of education for 11-year-olds up to 13 show that Labour is breaking its promises to the electorate.

Labour's manifesto pledge was to abolish the assisted places scheme and to use the money to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. The Bill abolishes the assisted places scheme but does nothing about the other side of the equation to ensure that class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds are reduced. I have already heard teachers in my constituency say that they know what will happen: the money will not appear; it will not be enough if it does appear; the chances of its coming are fairly slim; and that class sizes will not be reduced as a result of the Bill. Given that the Government are setting the tone for their whole period of office, I urge them to think carefully about the pledge that was given and to honour it.

I make no apologies to hon. Members who have heard me speak about the matter before, although I am sorry that it always seems to be the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), who is here when I raise the point, given that it concerns one of her ministerial colleagues. As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry said, the Bill's impact is most significant on families with 11 to 13-year-olds for whom the scheme is used because of social need. It is in such cases that the difficulties of adjusting when the child no longer has a place will be most significant, especially when the scheme has been used to provide boarding school education.

Charitable foundations contacted the hon. Member for Walton before the general election. He discussed the issue with them and gave them every expectation that even if the assisted places scheme was abolished, as Labour proposed, a way could be found to deal with children who required boarding school education because of social need, family background or other difficulties. Again, there was an expectation of Government action because of statements made—in good faith, I am sure—by the hon. Member for Walton. Charities and parents, in good faith, expected action.

I urge the Government to reconsider and to accept either our amendments or those proposed by others. They should ensure that the Bill does not go through with the breach of trust that exists as it stands, but accept that the hon. Member for Walton acted in good faith, and accept the genuine concerns expressed by Conservative and Liberal Members. The Government must accept that if they do not agree to the amendments, some children will be seriously affected. I urge them to find amendments that they can accept, so that the children involved can continue their education as they were promised.

5.15 pm

Mr. Clifton–Brown: Much has been said on the amendments, so I shall keep to a few brief remarks.

I should like to take the House back to the atmosphere that prevailed in March and April. Time after time, Conservative Members asked the Labour party, in the unlikely event, as we thought then, of it being elected, to give an expenditure pledge on this or that subject. It is therefore inconceivable that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) would have given a pledge on 11 to 13-year-olds if it had not been cleared by the right hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). He must have had it cleared, and the money must have been allocated.

If my maths is correct and it is right that about 2,000 places are involved in extending the assisted places scheme from 11 to 13-year-olds, and we generously assume that the marginal difference between the cost of educating a pupil under the scheme and education in the state system is about £2,000—I think that it is only £1,000 at the most—I calculate the additional cost to be in the region of £4 million. Given that people have based their decisions on their children's educational future on the basis that they would continue to be educated in the private maintained sector until 13, that is not an unreasonable cost.

Mrs. Gillan: My hon. Friend's mathematics is excellent, but the difference between the cost of a secondary place on the assisted places scheme and a state school place is only about £700 or £800. The sum involved is therefore considerably less.

Mr. Clifton–Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but I said that £2,000 was generous and that I thought that it was probably £1,000 or less. She has probably given a more accurate estimate. I ask the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), as she has already been asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), to give the Government's accurately calculated figure. That would be helpful.

I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May). I tried to get her as my next-door neighbour, but it did not quite work out. She has made an excellent start in the House, and I hope that we will hear many more of her contributions, because her grasp of this subject is obviously great. She and my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) made some telling remarks about the human aspect of the matter.

My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry mentioned cases where parents divorce. I have never had to grapple with that subject, and I hope that I never will. However, from friends who have had to grapple with it, I know that it is traumatic for the children. I hope that, even if the hon. Member for Yardley cannot incorporate it into the Bill, she will use the discretion available to her under the various Education Acts sensitively, so that, even if we cannot get a blanket extension for children aged 11 to 13 to continue on the scheme, sensitive human cases will be sympathetically considered.

I can conceive of other difficult cases. As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry said, if a local education authority operates a middle school system for children to the age of 12 and the assisted places scheme stops at the age of 11, children will have to change to one school and then to another at 13. Changing school always sets back a child's academic education, as we all know from our own children. Again, I hope that the Under–Secretary will be able to exercise her discretion in that circumstance.

A third category of human difficulty is that of a really bright child on the assisted places scheme who might get a scholarship to a privately maintained secondary school. He or she would have to leave the primary maintained

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school to go to a secondary school before getting a scholarship to continue further in the private system. That would mean further disruption for a child who, under normal circumstances, would not have expected it.

Amendment No. 28 deals with the type of state schools that might be available. Many of the best state schools have a waiting list—that is certainly the case in my constituency. Often, it is not possible for a child to get into the preferred school. Again, it may be a case of a child leaving an assisted place at 11 to go to a state school that may not have been his or her first choice. Great difficulties could be involved. The child might have to travel further from home and might not be with his or her friends or with relations who had attended the school nearest the home. Those are all individual circumstances that need to be taken into account.

Amendment No. 28 incorporates a number of features that must be taken into consideration. For example, the state school available might not be suitable on religious grounds for a child coming out of the private system. What would happen if a child had attended a private school with assisted places money, but the religious ethos of the state school nearest to his or her home was different? A child might be particularly gifted in music or sport, but the local state school might not have those facilities.

I am keen to ensure that all state schools have a wide curriculum. That is why the previous Government, with which my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) was involved, produced the White Paper "Sport: Raising the Game". I am keen for all our state schools to have good sports facilities.

Parental choice is what matters most in the extension of the assisted places scheme from the age of 11 to 13. After all, parents expected when they put their children into the private system with assisted places money that their child would stay there until the age of 13. If a parent has an expectation and the Government give a pledge—even when they are in opposition—under all the rules of basic justice, that pledge should be honoured. I appeal to right hon. and hon. Members on the Government Front Bench to honour that pledge. A small amount of money is involved and the parents affected have a right to expect that it will be honoured.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I will be brief, as others want to speak on this group of amendments.

I rise to support amendments Nos. 11, 3 and 28. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) made a number of telling points very eloquently. First, he referred to the human aspect of the Bill and how it will impact on children. It is important for us to recognise that we are talking about individual children within a peer group in a school who will be removed from that peer group as a consequence of this Bill. It is not simply a matter of those children transferring to another school inside the maintained sector, which may or may not be able to meet the child's needs as well as the school that he or she was attending. Clearly, in the parents' view, the school that the child was attending under the assisted places scheme offered them facilities and choice that were not available in the maintained sector.

There is a human aspect above and beyond that. Having made a choice on behalf of their children, parents had the reasonable expectation that their child would be able to proceed along that path. In addition, the children had become familiar with and very much a part of the school and its ethos. All of us with children know that, if they become attached to a school of any kind, leaving is a wrench and can have a deleterious impact on their education if they think that the way they are removed is unfair.

Secondly, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire referred to schools that appear to have a different character, but are in reality the same school, with a continuing ethos that runs from the primary to the secondary school. There is an example of just such in south Cambridgeshire. St. Faith's school enjoys the same charity number and the same Department for Education and Employment number as the Leys school. Parents of children attending St. Faith's have the expectation that their children will continue to the Leys when they are 13.

That brings me to the point of the amendment that deals with the impact on children who would normally be in a school until the age of 13 but who will be required, under the circumstances foreseen by the Government, to leave at 11. I shall not continue at length, as my hon. Friends have explained the case more eloquently than I could.

Parents clearly had reasonable expectations when they chose a school. Those expectations were reinforced as recently as April this year, when the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) said that, if children had commenced at a school, they would be able to continue until the age of 13. I fear that we may have discovered during this debate and from the Government's actions in moving the hon. Gentleman into the recesses of the Cabinet Office that, whereas we believed that there was a doctrine of collective responsibility on the part of the Government, there seems to be a doctrine of collective irresponsibility where pledges made in advance of the election are concerned.

In those circumstances, it was reasonable for parents to expect that their children would be able to proceed until the age of 13. For that reason, the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) was right to draw our attention to the fact that the Government made a pledge and that it is one that should be honoured, not broken.

As I said on Second Reading and when speaking on an earlier amendment—I think that the Minister said this from a sedentary position earlier—the Government argue that, if children are required to leave schools that they attended under the assisted places scheme, it is acceptable for them to revert to the maintained sector—which indeed it may be for some, but it is important for the Government to recognise that parents have made their choices for diverse reasons.

St. Mary's in south Cambridgeshire, for example, is a single-sex school with a Roman Catholic orientation. That brings me back to amendment No. 28. It is incumbent on Ministers to answer this point. If there is no school of the character that I have described, it is not sufficient for them to say that children must revert to the maintained sector and that that is good enough and they are in exactly the same position as all other children. If no choice of school is available to parents, where do Ministers expect their

children to go? On what basis are Ministers removing that choice? I want the Minister to clarify the situation in her reply.

Representations made to me by schools in my constituency seem to show that they foresee a time when children over the age of 11—when they would normally transfer to the maintained sector—in schools that take pupils up to the age of 13 may continue for one or two academic years and then, aged 13, be asked to transfer to the maintained sector. That may not be convenient; it may be difficult for those children to transfer into a new peer group and a new class of pupils who have been at that school for a couple of years.

By contrast, children at a neighbouring school who may have taken up their assisted places at 11 could continue with them through to 18. According to the letter from the Department for Education and Employment, one child of 12 may be required to leave school and enter the maintained sector a year later and another child of 12 on an assisted place may be assured of that place through to the age of 18. I should be grateful if the Minister would reflect on that point and, if time allows, answer that matter, which has been raised with me in my constituency. I should be grateful if she would say how that problem can be resolved.

It is right for Conservative Members to press an amendment that seeks to remove a provision that would mean the Government reneging on the pledge that they made before the election to allow children to continue from their primary places up to the age of 13.

5.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Estelle Morris): I am replying to a debate which has taken, I think, five days—we started in the early hours of Friday morning. The amendments deal with just one issue and I shall attempt to address the comments made. Although it has been a wide-ranging debate, the amendments are quite clear.

There have been a number of thoughtful and considered speeches. I am thinking particularly of the speeches of the hon. Members for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), to which I listened carefully. I apologise to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May): I realised some time after I sat down on Friday morning that I had not addressed her specific query, although I had intended to. I shall take the opportunity to do so now.

I share the hon. Lady's concern about children, of whatever background, whose education is made more difficult. I also share her concern about children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, who have enough to contend with without having to cope with extra burdens. I have not yet received representations from the organisation to which she referred on Thursday evening, but when I receive its letters I shall reply to them.

Mrs. May: I should be happy to pass the correspondence to the Minister directly in order to speed up the process. I am grateful for her generous comments, and I look forward to her addressing the issue as sympathetically as she suggested she would.

Ms Morris: The letters, which I shall look at, are probably wending their way from the officials to my office.

The hon. Lady referred to the assisted places scheme. I see from the note given to me by my officials that boarding fees are expressly precluded from the assisted places scheme. In the cases to which I suspect the hon. Lady is referring, an assisted places day scheme has been supplemented by boarding fees from elsewhere.

Mrs. May: I am talking about those cases where the boarding fees are paid by charitable foundations and the assisted places scheme is used to top up the educational element of the package.

Ms Morris: I do not wish to sound too sympathetic, for fear that I may mislead the hon. Lady, but our pledge not to extend the assisted places scheme remains firm. Decisions about whether to fund boarding education are for the local authority—sometimes they are mandatory and sometimes discretionary. That is a more complicated issue than that considered by the legislation. I shall ensure that a full reply is given, as I am aware of the hon. Lady's great interest in the subject.

I confirm that, as a Government, we have made it clear that we do not wish to extend the assisted places scheme and that the commitments that we gave in our manifesto will be honoured. I shall remind the Committee of those commitments. First, children in a secondary school will be able to finish secondary school and, secondly, children in a primary school will be able to finish primary school. Opinions differ over the age at which primary school is deemed to finish—whether it is 11 or 13. For all the long debates that we have had, it is that point which the amendments address.

I should like to clarify something that I think the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire was saying. The law has never allowed someone who takes a place under the primary assisted places scheme to transfer it and continue to 18. Even under the legislation passed by the Conservative Government, a child could not win a primary place aged five, seven, eight or 10 and automatically transfer it and use it up to the age of 18. My understanding is that someone on a primary assisted place would have to reapply for more funding for another place at 11 and someone on an assisted place at a prep school—where pupils stay until they are 13—would have to apply for a further place on a competitive basis at the age of 13.

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Lady is using a sympathetic tone, but her comments basically amount to, "No, no, no." Will she answer a specific question? Some children have been offered an assisted place at the age of 10, alongside others who have been offered places at the age of 11. It is my understanding that the director from the Department has visited the schools to say that those children cannot have their assisted places. Those pupils have already prepared themselves to spend the next seven or eight years in those schools.

The information that I have received show that those children number no more than 70 or 80. Will the Minister give me an answer now, at the Dispatch Box, on whether she will consider the cases and come to individual decisions using the discretionary powers granted to the Secretary of State in the Bill? Will she consider the cases, because they are causing a great deal of heartache and hardship to a small number of families?

Ms Morris: I have outlined the Government's thinking on the issue: the primary age should finish at 11 and the

[Ms Morris]

secondary age at 18. I can confirm that the Bill contains a discretionary clause that the Secretary of State will use. I cannot give the hon. Lady her answer now, but, if she wishes, I shall reply later.

The Bill's principle is clear. We had to decide whether we deemed that the primary level finished at 11—

Mr. Boswell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Morris: No, I must make some progress. I have been generous in giving way.

We had to decide whether the primary level finished at 11 or 13—that is the crux of the matter.

I shall give way now, but then I must make progress—this is likely to be the last time that I give way.

Mr. Boswell: I thank the hon. Lady, who has been most generous with her time.

I wonder whether, on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), I can invite the Minister to try to give her response before the Bill is further considered in another place.

Ms Morris: I shall certainly consider that invitation and try to respond to it—if not this evening, then later.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) talked about the age of transfer—11 or 13. He mentioned the difficulty of pupils entering schools where friendship groups have already been made, the curriculum has already been set and children have already settled down socially and academically.

Those aspects governed our decision on the transfer of pupils at 11 or 13. Half a million children every year already change schools at the age of 11. It is, therefore, sensible to provide for pupils to move into the maintained sector at the same age as other 11-year-olds transfer from primary to secondary schooling. Our approach is fair and puts the interests of the child ahead of the interests of the school—a point which was adequately summed up by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire.

It is also fair—using the guidance mentioned by the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire—that, if the age of transfer to secondary school in an area is other than 11, the Secretary of State should hold discretionary powers. That provision is contained in the Bill—it is one way in which the discretionary powers can be exercised.

I reiterate that the Secretary of State will have discretionary powers that he may exercise when he sees fit. The golden rule is to make sure that we do not expand the assisted places scheme. We must move as swiftly and as fairly as possible so that we may use the resources that are freed from the scheme to make sure that five, six and seven-year-olds will not be in classes of more than 30. That is dear to our hearts, and there is a genuine difference of opinion on the issue between the Government and the Opposition.

We believe that class size matters. We, too, want to give opportunities to children and we care about lost opportunities and broken dreams. We have made the commitment that we shall do all in our power to make sure that the education system delivers the best to the many and not the few. I shall use that phrase again.

It is wholly appropriate that public funding which, in the past, has been used to give opportunities to the few and deny them to the many, should more properly be used to ensure adequate class sizes. We have been generous and fair and have tried to ensure that no child's education is broken or damaged. We differ from the Opposition in that we think that to transfer 11-year-olds to the maintained sector is not dreadful. They will be transferred to good-quality schools where they will have opportunities and will succeed. Their education will not be damaged. We have more faith in the maintained system than Conservative Members who ran it for the past 18 years seem to have. That is why I invite the House to reject the amendments.

Mrs. Gillan: We intend to press the amendments to a vote, and I understand that Liberal Democrat Members will press for a vote on amendment No. 3.

This part of the Bill will go down as the broken pledge clause because the Walton pledge was broken by the Government within a few minutes of their coming to power. The amendments relate particularly to children of about 11, but the Minister does not fully appreciate that for many children that is a vulnerable age. There is no doubt that such children will be badly affected by the Bill.

The Minister repeated the saying, "We are for the many, not the few." Therefore, the voice of protest and the voices of the parents of those children is obviously too small to be heard by the Government, although they are the few and not the many. If they were a mob, they would be listened to by the Government, but, because they are small in number and the children are from low-income families, the Government ride roughshod over them.

I do not want to add much to the excellent speeches by my hon. Friends. If the Minister is so firmly committed to abolishing assisted places, why did the Secretary of State agree to allow me when I was the Minister responsible for this area to expand the primary school places for at least a year? Was it not the most callous act to allow the scheme to expand for just 12 months? The Secretary of State was keen to get more money so that he could try to keep a pledge which he knows it will be impossible to fulfil.

The reason for the Bill is to produce extra money to enable the Government to try to reduce class sizes, but the money that will be gleaned will be nowhere near enough to do that. When he appeared with me on a television programme earlier today the Minister of State gave the impression that he was scrabbling around for money to fulfil his pledge on class sizes. In answer to a question about funding for primary schools he said:

> "What we are doing is, we are releasing money from the nursery voucher scheme and the phasing out of the assisted places scheme. In the short term, that will bring in more resources."

He has not said how much will be released by the abolition of the nursery voucher scheme, but it is beginning to dawn on the Government that even the abolition of the assisted places scheme will not give them enough to fulfil their pledge. The first broken promise is the Walton pledge, and the next is the pledge on class sizes.

The Minister would not give me an answer about 10-year-olds. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) yesterday received a fax from a parent who is extremely concerned about this issue. I hope that the Minister will be decent enough to write to me on the matter because the author of the fax is the constituent of a Labour Member who, I understand, will take the matter up with the Department. The constituent writes:

"The assisted places scheme is affecting children who have been offered a place for 10-plus entry to secondary school this September. Very few schools in the assisted places scheme offer a 10-plus entry and so this ruling only affects a small number of children. But these few seem to me to be being overlooked and unfairly treated."

5.45 pm

The Minister is not paying attention. Those children are certainly being overlooked. The fax continues:

"For these children starting their secondary education at 10 they are to all intents and purposes in exactly the same position as those children who will be starting their secondary education at 11 this September. Both groups were notified of their assisted places at the same time, both will by now have begun to make the necessary arrangements for changing schools. Some will even have bought uniforms and both will be looking forward to spending the next seven or eight years at their chosen schools. Yet the dividing line has been drawn between them, and for this small group of 10-plus, maybe as few as 70, their future has been made worryingly uncertain. They achieved an assisted place and now, even before they have started the school, they have been told it will be taken away from them. It will only run for one year."

By not considering those children, how much would the Minister save? How much would it cost her to honour those places and not destroy the lives of some 70 children? It is obvious that the Government are interested only in the many and not the few. I am not hopeful of any understanding from them.

Amendment No. 28 was spoken to by some of my hon. Friends. I challenge the Minister's statement that there is only one point in the amendments. Has she read them or did she just read the notes that were provided by her officials? The amendments certainly contain another point, and it is a key one because it deals with the provision of comparable education for children who are going on to secondary schools. Amendment No. 28 shows that the areas that we picked out were religious content, curriculum provided, opportunities for sport, class sizes, which are so dear to the Minister's heart, and, of course, single-sex provision.

Ms Estelle Morris: I read the amendment, but it seemed so out of tune with the hon. Lady's acts when she was in government that I thought it could not possibly be serious. Does comparability of class size mean that the hon. Lady and her party have changed their minds? Do they now believe that class size matters, and does the hon. Lady think that going from a class of 15 to a class of 35 would cause problems?

Mrs. Gillan: The hon. Lady seems to forget that I do not have to answer the questions now. *[Interruption.]* She has to answer them, but she was in opposition for a long time and a leopard cannot change its spots. She has to answer the questions and her response to these amendments has made it obvious that she is incapable of doing that.

As to religious content, will the Minister assure me that these children will have a Catholic school available to them, or perhaps a school that has worship every day or mass? Will the school deal with moral education in the same way as the school that the child has come from? She obviously does not care.

On the curriculum, these children sometimes study Latin, Greek and the classics. Will the Minister ensure that children will have the choice and the chance in the state sector to study those subjects? Will they be able to study politics and economics at A-level? State schools should offer at least the spread of subjects that is often offered by schools that these children would have expected to go to.

On sport at school, will those children be able to play lacrosse, hockey, cricket, rugby fives, real tennis, golf or rowing? Has the Minister any idea of the range of sports? Before she laughs, I have been told that Mike Atherton, who has just captained the England side to a brilliant success, which, I assure hon. Members, had nothing to do with a Labour Government—the side trained under a Tory Government—held an assisted place. Will the children be taught in the same size of class and will there be single-sex provision? The differences are obvious.

I have no hope that the Government will listen to anything that Conservative Members say. When I was a Minister and we considered legislation in Committee, we did listen and make adjustments. This Government have shown that they are not going to make adjustments or to listen. This group of amendments will be remembered as the broken Walton pledge amendments.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 147, Noes 400.

Division No. 23] **[5.51 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward

(Old Bexley & Sidcup)
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Richard Ottaway and
Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard *(Shef'ld Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Thomas
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John
(Copeland)
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley
(Stretford & Urmston)
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*

Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steven
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McFall and
Ms Bridget Prentice.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 3, in page 2, line 5, after 'or,' insert—

'(b) in the case of a pupil with an assisted place at a school providing education for children up to the age of 13 but not beyond, at the end of the school year in which he attains the age of 13, or '.—*[Mr. Don Foster.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 181, Noes 354.

Division No. 24] **[6.8 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard *(Sheffld Hallam)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brake, Thomas
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forsythe, Clifford
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don (Bath)
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*

Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward *(Old Bexley & Sidcup)*
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Opik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Wallace, James
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steven
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and Mr. David Heath.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie (Bristol W)
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick (Bedford)
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*

Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. John McFall and
Ms Bridget Prentice.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

REGULATIONS FOR PURPOSES OF TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I beg to move amendment No. 35, in page 3, line 2, leave out from 'to' to 'fees' in line 3 and insert

'direct a school to refrain from making or postpone or reduce an increase in'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 12, page 3, line 10, leave out paragraph (d).

No. 13, page 3, line 44, leave out 'two years' and insert 'one year'.

No. 14, page 3, line 46, leave out 'two years' and insert 'one year'.

No. 26, in clause 5, clause 5, page 5, line 35, leave out paragraph (a).

Mr. Lidington: Amendment No. 35 would replace the power provided under clause 3 for the Secretary of State to determine the maximum fee level that schools may charge assisted places pupils with a power for him to direct schools to

"refrain from making the increase or . . . postpone or restrict the amount of the increase".

As the Minister will be aware, the words in my amendment have been taken from the Education (Assisted Places) Regulations 1995. I should like to probe the reasons why the Government have decided to provide a new power for Ministers to intervene in setting maximum fee levels, rather than relying on the regulations' sufficient safeguards against abuse of the system.

I can understand why any Government would like to establish measures to deal with abuse, and I appreciate that there are fears that perhaps one school in 1,000 might attempt to exploit the assisted places scheme or the Bill's transitional arrangements by imposing extortionate fees that are designed to milk the taxpayer rather than to

[Mr. Lidington]

provide a decent education for assisted places pupil. The need for safeguards against such abuse or fraud has been demonstrated, but the 1995 regulations already provide substantial safeguards.

Parents must apply to schools for a fee remission and supply schools with detailed information about their circumstances. The regulations give the Secretary of State power to direct that, in specific cases, parents shall not be entitled to a fee remission if he is satisfied that the parents have knowingly or recklessly furnished information for determining remission or have supplied false information.

Under the regulations, in such circumstances the Secretary of State must give parents the right to make representations before finalisation of any decision to block a fees remission. Nowhere in the Bill is a similar right to make representations offered to schools before the Secretary of State may intervene to exercise the power provided by the Bill to set a maximum fee level. I hope that the Minister will flesh out the Government's thinking on such matters.

The 1995 regulations allow the Secretary of State to specify the manner and form in which parents should make applications and declare their actual or expected income. Moreover, the Secretary of State may specify the nature of any documentary material that parties must produce in support of their case. Under section 21 of the regulations, a school is not permitted to increase fees for any pupil in the assisted places scheme without one month's written notice to the Secretary of State. The same section gives the Secretary of State powers to block or postpone such a fee increase or to restrict its amount.

Those powers seem to be sufficient to guard against any suspected abuse of the system. I therefore question why the Government believe that it is necessary to introduce a new power for the Secretary of State to go beyond blocking a fee increase which a school proposes for its reasons and to intervene in setting a maximum fee level. I do not want the House to give Ministers more powers than are absolutely necessary to intervene in the affairs of independent institutions.

I hope that the Minister will be able to offer the reassurance that I seek. If not, I hope that he will suggest ways in which the Government might attempt to amend clause 3 or clarify the matter in the regulations.

Mr. James Paice (South–East Cambridgeshire): I will address my remarks to amendment No. 12, which refers to the provision that allows the Secretary of State to discharge his obligations through the payment of a lump sum.

The purpose of the amendment is to obtain from the Government an assurance that the provision is not designed to short-change the schools that will receive such payments. Clearly, schools expect to receive their payments over time and in stages. I am somewhat puzzled that the Treasury has allowed the Government to suggest payment of a lump sum which gives no cash flow advantage. I am concerned that the lump sum may have been proposed because the Government want substantially to reduce the money that would otherwise have been paid through the staged process. The amendment's purpose is to obtain an assurance from the Government that they will not offer a substantially lesser sum than would have been paid through the staged process.

6.30 pm

We know that the ultimate purpose of the Bill is to reduce class sizes, and that the Government want to realise the money to achieve that. My hon. Friends have spoken about our belief that the figures do not add up. They do not add up to an even greater extent when one takes into account the proposition that the Government can discharge their obligation through the payment of a lump sum.

Clearly, schools will need to know the proper costs of the abolition of the assisted places programme. They will need to look at the numbers and the opportunity that they will have to fill the vacated places from other sources. They also need to take into account the costs of restructuring, possible staff redundancies, physical alterations to buildings and all the other costs that will come from the abolition of the scheme.

I hope, therefore, that the Committee will understand the Opposition's concerns. The schools' needs do not seem to fit with the proposal that the Secretary of State should be able to discharge his obligation through the payment of a lump sum. I ask the Minister to give a categorical assurance that the obligations to the schools that will be hard hit by the abolition of the assisted places scheme will be met properly. I also ask for an assurance that the Minister's desire to discharge those obligations through a lump sum does not and will not involve any lesser payment than would have been made through the staged process.

Mr. Byers: I begin by addressing the issues raised by the hon. Member for South–East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), which he raised in a most appropriate and reasonable manner. I understand his concerns. It is not the Government's intention through the Bill in any way adversely to affect the independent schools that take part in the assisted places scheme at the moment by introducing the possibility of a lump sum arrangement.

I give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that we want to proceed on the basis of an agreement with the individual school when considering the introduction of a lump sum payment. We do not wish to impose such a proposal on an individual school, but we believe that there may be circumstances when it is in the interests of both the taxpayer and the individual school to introduce a lump sum payment.

For example, as the scheme is being wound down, the numbers attending a particular school may be reduced to such a level that the administrative costs for an individual school may outweigh the benefits of the income that it receives from the Government. In those circumstances, it may be in the interests of both the taxpayer and the individual school to seek a lump sum payment.

I give the shadow Minister an assurance that it is not the Government's intention to impose such a solution on an individual school. We would wish to proceed on the basis of an agreement. Only when such an understanding was arrived at would we want to use the lump sum payment provisions.

On amendment No. 35, I can genuinely understand the concerns of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington). We do not want to introduce a new system that fundamentally alters the present arrangements. Our difficulty is that, as a result of

provisions elsewhere in the Bill, the participation arrangements and the participation contracts which would cover the issues dealt with by the hon. Gentleman will no longer be with us. As the participation agreements are no longer there, we have to find a new procedure to deal with the issues that would normally have been covered by such agreements.

The provisions merely reflect the arrangements that operated under the previous Government. We do not wish to change in any dramatic way the provisions that apply under existing regulations. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, the existing provisions, specifically section 480(1)(b) of the Education Act 1996, give a degree of flexibility to the arrangements. We wish to see that flexibility in the Bill.

Flexibility is necessary. It was interesting that, in moving amendment No. 35, the hon. Gentleman specifically addressed the need for provisions to deal with fees escalating. In some cases, fees in the independent sector go down, so we need flexibility in the funding arrangements to reflect changes that may take place. The provisions in clause 3 continue the existing arrangements and give the flexibility to which the hon. Gentleman referred. It is not the Government's intention to intervene directly in these matters as long as we can secure value for taxpayers' money. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees on the necessity of achieving that.

The hon. Gentleman raised an important point about representations being made. We have sympathy with that approach and we do not want to disturb the existing arrangements whereby representations can be made in the way that the hon. Gentleman outlined. I hope that I have been able to assure Conservative Members about our intentions in clause 3, and I hope that they will reconsider the necessity of pressing the amendment.

Mr. Lidington: I am grateful to the Minister for his response, which was not only courteous and informative, but dealt helpfully with my concerns. In view of his assurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 3, line 25, at end insert—

'(g) require local education authorities to provide information to the Secretary of State about the financial and other effects of the abolition of the assisted places scheme.'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in clause 3, page 3, line 42, leave out 'or (b)' and insert '(b) or (g)'.

No. 4, page 3, line 46, at end insert—

'(7) Before making regulations under this Section, the Secretary of State shall, in respect of any area in which there is a former participating school, consult the local education authority for that area concerning the availability of alternative school places in that area and the cost that will fall to the local education authority of providing such places.'.

New clause 1—*Annual report to Parliament*—

'.—Within one year of this Act coming into force, and annually thereafter for a period of no less than seven years, the Secretary of State shall make a report to Parliament on the effect of the abolition of the assisted places schemes.'.

Mr. Foster: The amendments would mean that local education authorities would be required to provide reports to the Secretary of State on the effects of the abolition of the assisted places scheme, including the financial implications. They would also require the Secretary of State to make an annual report to Parliament during the seven years of the phasing out of the assisted places scheme in order to detail the impact of the Bill.

The whole Committee will agree that since the new Government came to power, they have introduced a large number of proposals. Indeed, in doing so, they have left a number of people fairly breathless and somewhat uncertain about whether some of the proposals are likely to deliver the goods.

Indeed, on several occasions, the House and the British people have been asked to take a rather large number of issues on trust. Yesterday, for example, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was debating with our European partners his proposals for resolving the significant unemployment problems throughout Europe. He announced various proposals that a number of people, including the Irish Foreign Minister, subsequently described as rather thin.

Today, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced her proposals to require primary schools to introduce one hour of literacy teaching every day. Again, much has had to be taken on trust. As the Under-Secretary of State knows, the national curriculum is massively overloaded, and it will be difficult to put that proposal into practice.

Many of us are concerned that unless the Government get the whole package right, they may not be able to deliver some of their worthwhile proposals. The same applies to the Bill. The Government are introducing legislation to abolish the assisted places scheme, through which they intend to save money in order to reduce class sizes for primary school children aged five, six and seven.

As I have said on previous occasions, the Liberal Democrats entirely support the proposed abolition of the assisted places scheme. We also support the proposal to reduce class sizes. Indeed, we urge the Government to go further and reduce class sizes not just for five, six and seven-year-olds, but for all primary school children, as we believe that class sizes are crucial. However, as has been pointed out several times during the debate, many people have grave reservations as to whether the savings from the abolition of the assisted places scheme will be sufficient to deliver the Government's promise.

On Thursday, the Minister for School Standards said:

"We believe that we are moving in a way that will deliver on a clear pledge that we made to the British people during the general election."—[*Official Report*, 5 June 1997; Vol.295, c. 592.]

Clearly, the Minister is anxious to keep that pledge and we fully understand that. However, the big question is whether the money that will be released from the assisted places scheme will enable the Government to deliver on it.

In previous speeches, I have referred to the uncertainty of the Under-Secretary of State for Wales and the considerable doubt expressed by the Institute of Public Finance. I have also referred to the figures that were produced on this very issue by the previous Administration in answer to parliamentary questions. Does the Minister really believe that he can deliver that

[Mr. Foster]

pledge just by using the money from the assisted places scheme? I always believed that he did until I listened carefully to him on Thursday when he said:

"We have always made it clear that the pledge will be honoured at the end of the lifetime of this Parliament. By the year 2000, £100 million will be freed up from the assisted places scheme, and that will make an important contribution towards achieving our class sizes pledge."—[*Official Report*, 5 June 1997; Vol.295, c. 595.]

It is therefore quite clear from that that even the Minister is beginning to doubt whether the money that will be released will be sufficient to achieve what he wants.

Mr. Byers: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that a Parliament normally lasts five years. I do not know whether he needs one of our numeracy hours, but five years will take us to 2002. We shall save £1 million by the turn of the century and the following two years will provide even more money to ensure that we can deliver on our class sizes pledge.

Mr. Foster: If I need a numeracy hour, the Minister certainly does, too. He has just told the House that his proposals will save only £1 million. I am sure that he meant to say £100 million. Never mind. I shall get it right for him.

The Minister cannot deny that many people are concerned about the figures. When the Under-Secretary of State replies to the debate, perhaps she will answer a question that she was asked on Thursday: whether she and the Government are prepared to place in the Library their own estimates of the savings that will be achieved by the abolition of the assisted places scheme and the cost of meeting their pledge. After all, the details of how they plan to deliver have not yet been worked out, and are not likely to be available until the White Paper is published at the end of the month.

The Minister might also like to consider other ways of saving additional money to meet another pledge that we have not heard so much about that may also contribute to reducing class sizes. I hope that the Under-Secretary will tell us whether we are shortly to hear about the abolition of the Funding Agency for Schools as that would save some £12.5 million. I do not know whether she has had a chance to look at the report in *The Guardian* today. If she has not, I thoroughly recommend it.

6.45 pm

The abolition of the Funding Agency for Schools will be supported by Members on both sides of the House when they discover that it is now spending taxpayers money on producing a booklet called "Media Advice Notes for Schools". As *The Guardian* points out, the advice brings

"to mind spoof hints to foreign visitors, such as: don't wait to be served in a British pub—you're expected to help yourself;".

Some of it is quite amazing. It begins:

"Contact with your local media is invaluable . . . Journalists do not generally appreciate large drinks or heavy lunches—but they may well accept an invitation to lunch in the school canteen."

If that is the advice of the Funding Agency for Schools, I suspect that the Government would do well to abolish it quickly and save a bit of extra money to help provide the funding that they will need to deliver on their pledge on class sizes.

On Second Reading, I made it clear that we are not all convinced that the sums add up, but we are prepared to give the Government the benefit of the doubt. We hope that they will be able to produce the document to which I referred and place it in the Library as quickly as possible. We also believe that, in order to keep track of what the Government are doing and whether they are living up to their pledge, it is vital that local education authorities report annually to the Secretary of State, and that the Secretary of State reports to Parliament. That is the import of the amendments and I hope that they will be supported by the Government and by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Ms Estelle Morris: The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) has raised some interesting points. I share his concern about accountability and the House having every opportunity to monitor what the Government are doing and to make sure that we are working towards achieving our clear targets.

It is indeed our intention to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds to 30 by the end of this Parliament—2002. I know that the hon. Gentleman agrees. I look forward to his encouragement and support in our progress towards achieving that aim.

We accept that reports should be made to the House on an annual basis, on policies and financial plans. However, I remind the hon. Gentleman that that is already included in the Department's annual report. In that sense the amendments and the new clauses are unnecessary.

I can also give him further assurances—

Mr. Byers: Not too many.

Ms Morris: —but not too many, as my hon. Friend says—that we are not seeking to avoid our responsibility to answer to the House for our actions and to make sure that we keep the pledges that we made to the electorate. I therefore assure him that we shall make arrangements to include in the annual report a section that specifically deals with the progress being made in the phasing out of assisted places and our work toward reducing class sizes.

Turning to amendments Nos. 1 and 2, local authorities already provide annual returns to the Government and much of that information will take into account any changes arising from the phasing out of the assisted places scheme. I hope that the hon. Member for Bath will accept the assurances in the spirit in which they were given. We want to move towards our goal. We have no wish to avoid being answerable to the House for either our policies or our financial needs.

Mr. Don Foster: The Under-Secretary is clearly about to finish her speech, but I think that the House would be interested in answers to the two other questions. Will she place a report in the Library as soon as possible detailing the Government's estimate of the cost of reducing class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds; and what plans does she have for the abolition of the Funding Agency for Schools for England?

Ms Morris: The Funding Agency for Schools for England is not a proper matter for debate either under this group of amendments or the Bill. We shall be addressing

those matters in due course. I know that the hon. Gentleman will look forward to a debate on whatever is announced.

We have made available all the financial information that we are obliged to make available under consideration of the Bill. Our financial plans and policies will be made available in the annual report. Having given those assurances, I hope that the hon. Member for Bath will accept them and withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Foster: Unfortunately, although I am very tempted by the Under-Secretary's assurances, I cannot accept her suggestion to withdraw the amendment. I shall explain clearly why I am not prepared to do so. I asked very simply whether she was prepared to place a detailed analysis of the Government's figures on the likely cost of the reduction of class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, but her answer was that they have provided all the information that they are required to provide.

We know that the amount of financial information that has been made available in respect of the Bill is very limited and does not answer many of the questions raised. The fear must therefore be that the section of the annual report to which the Under-Secretary referred—I am grateful to her for at least making that commitment—may provide only the bare minimum of information that the Government are required to provide. The House and the country deserve a far more detailed analysis—financial and otherwise—of a very important Government pledge. If we cannot get them to provide such analysis, it is important that the House should decide whether the commitment should be imposed on them. For that reason, I shall press the amendment to a Division.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 38, Noes 340.

Division No. 25] **[6.52 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard *(Sheffld Hallam)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Thomas
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Fearn, Ronnie
Forsythe, Clifford
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gorrie, Donald
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Opik, Lembit
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Wallace, James
Webb, Steven
Willis, Phil

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Paul Tyler and
Mr. Andrew Stunell.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric

Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stott, Roger
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Graham Allen.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clauses 3 to 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

New clause 2

POWER OF LOCAL AUTHORITY TO CONTINUE TO ASSIST PUPILS

'Nothing in this Act shall prevent a local authority from reimbursing a former participating school in respect of the fees of any pupil resident in the area of that local authority whom the authority determines may benefit from education at that school.'.—*[Mr. St. Aubyn.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss new clause 3—*Power of charity to continue to assist pupils—*

'—(1) Nothing in this Act shall prevent a charity from reimbursing either—

(a) a former participating school, or

(b) a local authority,

in respect of the fees of any pupil resident in the area of that local authority whom the authority determines may benefit from education at that school.

(2) Expenditure by a charity in making a reimbursement under subsection (1) above shall be charitable expenditure within the meaning of section 44 of the National Lottery etc. Act 1993.'

Mr. St. Aubyn: I have found out about powers that the House has that, as a new Member, I had not dreamed I would be learning about so soon. I am very grateful to the Public Bills Office for its assistance in drafting the new clauses. I apologise if they are deficient, but they come from a new Back Bencher. I should like to explain their purpose.

In the debate in Committee, Conservatives have felt that we were dealing with closed minds in the Government. I hope that the Ministers will take the opportunity of the new clauses to show that they do not have closed minds and that they are prepared to listen to points that are made consistently and in a heartfelt way by Opposition Members. When a point with which Ministers feel that they can agree is made, I hope that they are prepared to listen. I hope that that will prove to be the case with the new clauses.

' I also hope that the Liberal Democrats, bearing in mind what they said about their support for local partnership schemes in their manifesto, will give their support to the new clause.

Mr. Don Foster: If it enables the hon. Gentleman to move on, I can assure him that, if the new clauses are pressed to a vote, he will get the support of the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am grateful to the hon. Member for that assurance. It is welcome and, no doubt, it will add weight to the arguments that I shall put to the Government.

While it may go against the grain for a new Labour Government to use funds from the Department for Education and Employment to meet the costs of the assisted places scheme, we have already established in debate that the additional cost, over the standard cost of education in the state sector, is no more than around £1,000 per child per year. I may be being optimistic, but in certain areas—including my area in Surrey—it might be possible to find charities or companies to put up the money, or to use funds and bursaries from the schools involved in the scheme, to bridge the gap of £1,000 per year. Such charities, companies or bursaries would not be able to meet the much greater cost of nearly £4,000 a year that would arise if all the funding for the scheme were withdrawn. We should not forget, however, that in that case the state sector would still have to pick the tab for educating the children in state schools

It should also be clear to Ministers that, however comforting the calculations made in their offices by civil servants, the impact of the scheme in certain areas is much greater than in others. While the scheme has not taken root in a big way in the areas that Labour Members represent, it has filled a need in areas about which they do not have the same knowledge but which we represent. That is why we have argued against the Bill hour after hour, and sought an extra day of debate.

I will give some examples. In the county of Surrey, there are 1,264 children on the assisted places scheme in 22 schools. In contrast, in Buckinghamshire there are just nine children at one school involved in the scheme. If we consider our cities, they tell the same story. In the city of Bristol, there are nearly 1,500 children involved in nine schools; yet in the much larger city of Birmingham there are barely 600 children involved in just six schools.

Just as the take-up of assisted places is concentrated in certain areas, the problems and difficulties created by winding down the scheme would also be concentrated. The problem is made worse because of the decision already made today that the education of those on the scheme in the primary sector will end at the age of 11. That will mean that, as the scheme is phased out, all the burden on the local state sector will be borne by one year group—year seven. While we heard some comforting numbers from the Minister the other day about the tiny percentage of children involved who will be shifted from the independent sector to state schools, in Guildford the year group numbers will be inflated by nearly 10 per cent. That is why the pressures of the scheme need a valve to relieve them.

In Surrey, we have other pressures. We already have rising school rolls. This afternoon I spoke to the chairman of Surrey county council education committee, who said that we will have to find an extra £3 million to cope with the rising school numbers in the state system, even before the effect of the abolition of the scheme. While the marginal cost of educating a child in the state sector at secondary school and in sixth form may be only £2,700, that does not take account of capital expenditure. The rise in numbers will not be absorbed by schools in my area without incurring further capital expenditure. It is clear that there are many reasons why certain local authorities would be keen to see the scheme continued.

I am conscious that we have heard from some Labour Members that they are against the assisted places scheme in principle, and not just because of the savings that they claim will be achieved to help primary schools. The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) has said:

"My main reason for wanting to get rid of the assisted places scheme is that it perpetuates the class system."—[*Official Report*, 2 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. 46.]

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has told us that this is a socialist Bill. We know that, but the Government are new Labour and we hope that they will listen to our points.

7.15 pm

Labour Members may believe that the scheme is divisive in their areas, but the assisted places scheme, far from being divisive, gives children in my constituency a wider choice and opportunity. They are lucky to have good state schools and they are also lucky to have the choice of assisted places. Independent education is extremely popular in my area. Nearly one in five families choose to send their children to independent schools. In such an area, the scheme is not divisive. I recognise, of course, that the area that I represent is fortunate.

If the Government wish to make savings on assisted places to give more money to primary schools to achieve the class sizes that have already been achieved in Surrey, they are entitled to do so. However, the purpose of the new clauses is to ask the Government not to be dogmatic and to leave some flexibility for local education authorities, such as Surrey, to try to bridge the gap of £1,000 a year that an assisted place costs on average through independent funding.

If we can find that funding from somewhere, why should the Government stand in the way? The Government will still make the savings that they have budgeted for on behalf of primary schools. In fact, given the doubts that we have cast on the savings, the real risk is that by pressing ahead with the scheme now you will not make those savings because of the knock-on effects of winding down the scheme. It is in your interests as much as in ours and our constituents' to allow the flexibility that the new clauses will provide.

New clause 2 would make it clear that local authorities could take the initiative and continue with a form of the assisted places scheme. The purpose of new clause 3 is to provide for a wide range of sources of funding to bridge the gap between the standard cost of a secondary school education and that of an assisted place. It would ensure that the widest possible range of sources of funding would be achieved.

I believe that it was a Government press release that, only a couple of weeks ago, talked of allowing lottery funds to be used to promote education, health and other

[Mr. St. Aubyn]

initiatives that fell outside the services provided by taxation. There could be no clearer example of an initiative that, on your own definition, falls outside—

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is a new Member, but he keeps using the words "you" and "your". The matters under discussion are not my responsibility.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Lord. I will try to remember it.

I was trying to explain that the Government issued a press release clearly setting out the case for lottery funding, among other sources, to be used for initiatives that they do not consider should fall within the ambit of their departmental spending—a decision that, as a Government, they are entitled to make. Surely, if there is any initiative which deserves such funding, it must be the initiative that I am suggesting.

The new clause does not demand or instruct that lottery funds be used to provide money for the assisted places; it merely leaves open avenues that should be left open, in a free and open society in which the Government do not seek to dictate the minutiae of how individual local authorities and areas seek to answer educational needs as best they can, by meeting the challenge of providing a good education in their areas.

I would welcome a contribution by the Minister for School Standards, if he would like to make one, before I press the new clause to a vote.

Mr. Byers: First, I welcome the shadow Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for South–West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), to the Committee. We missed her last week, and I am delighted to see that she is now in robust good health.

On new clause 3, the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) talked about the potential for using the proceeds from the national lottery to replace the funding now available through the assisted places scheme. That shows the fundamental difference concerning the way in which the Government wish to use the proceeds from the national lottery.

We have been greatly concerned that in the past the proceeds were often used to fund the pet projects of individuals, which did not reflect the interests or needs of the nation at large. The lottery was used to buy the Churchill papers, for example, and for other types of spending that we feel do not suit what should be the people's lottery. We want to see the resources gained from people playing the people's lottery devoted to causes that have broad popular support. I have to tell the hon. Member for Guildford that I do not believe that using the proceeds of the lottery to replace the assisted places scheme would be applauded throughout the country.

People play the lottery, obviously, in the hope of winning, but also in the belief that some of the profits will be used for good causes. In my view—the hon. Gentleman may disagree with it—a new form of assisted places scheme funded by the national lottery would not be regarded as a good use of the proceeds of the national lottery. The Labour party believes that the lottery should be used to improve aspects that go beyond statutory provision, but which can in real terms add genuine quality to our provision for young people.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Surely the idea of children from low-income families getting an extra opportunity is entirely in keeping with the thinking behind the lottery.

Mr. Byers: The Government are determined that all children will be offered a high-quality education. That is the real challenge that we face in government. There should be no question of a small group of individual children, whether from low-income families or not, receiving a quality of education denied to other young people.

That is why we have had the debate today and last Thursday, which has demonstrated clearly the fundamental divisions between the present Government and the Members who now sit on the Opposition Benches. They had responsibility for the education service for 18 years, and although I concede that they offered a good quality of education to a handful of young people, for the vast majority they offered a quality of education that my hon. Friends and I find unacceptable.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Byers: In a second.

We must turn that round, and in the process we shall use the funds from the assisted places scheme to make a positive contribution.

In addition, as we have said, we shall use money from the national lottery for other purposes. For example, it can fund homework clubs where young people can have support in doing their homework in a quiet environment after school hours. We believe that, in providing for that, we shall add real quality to the education that young children receive.

Mr. Hayes: The Minister described as "poor quality" the education offered to many children over the past 18 years. Does he concede that that was, at least in part, the responsibility of local education authorities most of which were controlled by the Labour party for much of the past 18 years?

Secondly, will he define for us the difference between what he regards as core provision—in which I would include homework—and what he regards as somehow outside core provision, so that homework clubs can legitimately be funded as he describes?

Mr. Byers: Well—

Mr. Hayes: That was two interventions for the price of one.

Mr. Byers: Yes, but it should be a question of quality rather than quantity. Both his interventions show that the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), who is a new Member, has forgotten the policies of the Conservative Government, who refused to take action on homework. When we were in opposition, we argued that there should at least be guidance on homework. The then Government rejected that idea.

We recognised the importance of homework in terms of developing education opportunities for young people, but that was not the view taken by the Conservative Government. We were disappointed by their negative response. As things stand, homework is not part of statutory provision, but there should be an expensive network of homework clubs, and we shall use the proceeds of the national lottery to support such initiatives.

We do not believe that new clause 3 shows a proper way forward, or that lottery funds should be used to buy places in the private sector. On new clause 2, I hope that I can offer some comfort to the hon. Member for Guildford—certainly in line with the spirit in which he introduced it.

However, before I do so, I shall pick up two of the points that the hon. Gentleman made. He mentioned a meeting that he had with the chairman of Surrey education committee, who expressed concern about the increase in pupil numbers in the county and the impact that that would have on its education budget. We too are worried about the effects of rising pupil numbers—we have been for some years. That is why we argued long and hard against the policies of the Conservative Government, who failed to take any account of rising pupil numbers.

The hon. Gentleman may like to know that, in the past 10 years, the pupil population has increased by 450,000; at the same time, the number of teachers has fallen by 6,000. That is because the Conservative Government failed, as I say, to take into consideration the impact of higher pupil numbers. Hence many of us regard it as richly ironic that the hon. Member for Guildford should argue his case as he does.

The hon. Member for Guildford mentioned the number of students in his constituency with assisted places. He is right to say that there are more of them in Guildford than almost anywhere else in the country. Indeed, my officials calculate that there are about 259—

Mr. St. Aubyn: The true figure is 374.

7.30 pm

Mr. Byers: My officials had great difficulty coming up with a precise figure. The figure that I have quoted relates to the number of young people actually attending schools in Guildford on assisted places. There appears to be a discrepancy in the figures, and I am prepared to accept the hon. Gentleman's version. Either way, it is considerably higher than the national average.

The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that there are nearly 7,000 infants in classes of more than 30 in Surrey. In this Government's view, we should be tackling class sizes for those children, using money that currently goes to the fewer than 400 on assisted places.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The average primary school class size in Surrey is only 26, and four out of five classes contain 30 or fewer children. The problem is that, to meet the Government's target of a maximum 30 per class, more of the 7,000 children that the Minister mentioned will be required to accept their parents' second or third choice of school. That may involve travelling further so as to bring some classes up to 30 and keep others down to 30. Some bright children may be pushed into higher years, while other children may be asked to move down to a lower year. All of this will be necessary to meet the Government's target, because there will be no extra money for teachers in Surrey.

Mr. Byers: We shall deal with some of those issues in the White Paper that we intend to publish towards the end of this month or at the beginning of next month. We shall consult extensively, talking to authorities such as Surrey's to ensure that we put in place a scheme that will deliver smaller classes without causing difficulties for parental preference.

The main point made by the hon. Member for Guildford concerned giving local authorities the power to use their resources to pay for places in the independent sector. I intend to ask the Committee to reject new clause 2, because it is unnecessary to include its provisions in the Bill, given that the Scholarship and Other Benefit Regulations 1977, made under section 518 of the Education Act 1996, already give LEAs the discretion to pay the whole or part of tuition fees, boarding or lodging fees, and other expenses relating to the attendance of a pupil at a fee-paying school. Those regulations cover most of what the hon. Member for Guildford sought.

If the local authority wants to use the money that it raises locally for this purpose, that is for it to decide. It will be held accountable by Surrey people, if that is how it wants to spend money from the education budget. The authority has the freedom to exercise that power—

Mr. St. Aubyn: Will the Minister make it absolutely clear that, if the local authority decides to provide a place for a child at a fee-paying school and can bridge the gap between the cost of a place at the state school and the cost of a place at the independent school by raising the money from charity, sponsorship and so on to do so, the Department will still refund the local authority to the tune of at least the standard cost of such a child's education, had he or she remained in the state sector?

Mr. Byers: That is a quite different point, as I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows. A child attending an independent school will not trigger a payment for standard spending assessment purposes, and we have no plans to change that arrangement. I therefore cannot give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks. What I can say is that existing regulations allow local authorities to bear the full costs of a place in the independent sector—and rightly so. The hon. Gentleman is trying to move us on to a different debate which may not be entirely in order this evening.

Mr. St. Aubyn: As I pointed out earlier, the standard spending assessment cost is critical. If the local authority is paid that cost, it is entirely realistic in areas such as ours to hope that the additional cost of sending the child to a fee-paying school can be met—

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Interventions must be brief. The hon. Gentleman cannot make a speech during an intervention.

Mr. Byers: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks. The local authority must carry the full cost of exercising its discretion.

[Mr. Byers]

I hope that I have been able to reassure the hon. Member for Guildford, at least in part. I know that I have not been able to give him complete satisfaction, but I can at least say that the power he wants to give to local authorities already exists. We can see no merit in including such a provision in the Bill, because it merely duplicates a power already in existence.

I ask the Committee to reject the new clause if it is pressed to a Division.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The Liberal Democrats support the new clauses, on the grounds that they are simply common sense. The Government have said that they want a smooth and sensitive transition from where we are to where we want to be. The new clauses would facilitate such a responsible transition.

We would be completely opposed, however, to the provisions being used as an opportunity to reintroduce the assisted places scheme by the back door. Nevertheless, there must be sufficient flexibility in the system to ensure that children who in some exceptional circumstance can benefit from a special opportunity for study are allowed to do so.

There must be an element of trusting local authorities: we must believe that they would not necessarily abuse the additional provisions. If we cannot trust authorities to make responsible decisions, there is a great problem in our education structure.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman says that the Liberal Democrats support the new clauses. Do they support new clause 3 and the use of lottery funds to buy places in the private sector?

Mr. Öpik: If that led to the simple replacement of the assisted places scheme with a similar scheme paid for by the lottery, absolutely not. We are saying that the provisions could provide a way for the Government to honour their commitment to a strict spending package and yet provide local authorities with some flexibility, ensuring that the people who benefit from the special educational opportunity can survive. I emphasise again that we are with the Government on abolition of the assisted places scheme: we do not support its reintroduction.

We are concerned about being seen to be fair. We want local authorities to have some limited flexibility to make such decisions. The Minister has reassured us about the provision that already exists. If that provides the flexibility that we seek to achieve through the new clause, perhaps that is a satisfactory solution, but if there is a failure to honour that flexibility in the long term, we shall be uncomfortable about it.

We support the new clause on the assumption that the provisions represent a sensible way in which to proceed, but we do not want assisted places to be supported wholesale by the national lottery.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I welcome the support of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), and I welcome the Minister's comments, as far as they go, but I am afraid that we have witnessed a loss of nerve tonight. The imaginative course would be to leave open a variety of opportunity in the Bill, when it is being offered on terms which do not jeopardise the plans to increase spending on primary school teachers.

It is a great pity because, in the Minister's narrow interpretation of a local authority's existing powers we heard a sharp closing down of the scheme and of the opportunities that it would give to children over and above those that we all want to give them in the state sector. I am, however, grateful to him for making it clear that all the local authorities' powers may be used to create what we might still loosely term assisted places and the Government will not stand in the way.

Having secured some clarification and assistance, with as much grace as I can, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.

7.45 pm

Ms Estelle Morris: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill is one of the first of the new Government. It shows our commitment to education and our determination to have an education service that raises standards for the many, not the few. It makes it absolutely clear that we have turned our back on policies based on the belief that only a few can succeed or that to reach the top one has to escape from the maintained sector.

The Bill will release funds that we will use to cut to 30 or fewer class sizes for all five, six and seven-year-olds. That pledge was one of the reasons why the people elected us to govern. Today, less than six weeks after the general election, we are passing legislation that will provide the resources to enable us to keep our promise.

Throughout our consideration of the Bill, we have been reminded that the maintained sector was run for the past 18 years by a Government who did not believe in its potential. We share the understandable concern that children should attend schools where they can achieve at the highest levels. We differ, in that Conservative Members such as the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) believe that that cannot be done in the state sector.

Bright children pass examinations, go to universities and other institutions of further learning and take posts in all walks of life, at all levels, with all sorts of responsibilities, having been educated and given their life chances in the state system. The challenge for our country is not to devise ways of helping some to escape to the private sector but to ensure that all our pupils get the standard of education that can currently be found in the best of our state schools.

The resources that will be released through the Bill will be used to give a better start to the 440,000 five, six and seven-year-olds who are currently in classes of more than 30. Class sizes matter. They matter most in the early years, because children can get more attention, more teacher time and more space, and they can be taught in more manageable groups. It is not the only thing that matters and will not by itself solve all the problems that

we face in our education service, but we believe that it is a crucial part of our overall plans to raise standards for our children.

No one can be surprised by the contents of the Bill. As was drawn to our attention on Second Reading, we have opposed the assisted places scheme every single year since it was introduced. Private schools have had every opportunity to prepare for the removal of the subsidy. In any case, the Bill fulfils our promise to protect the interests of those children who are currently in the scheme or who have already been offered places to start in the next academic year.

The previous Government presided over steadily rising class sizes. Much has been said by Conservative Members about the number of assisted places in their constituencies. They have not spoken about the five, six and seven-year-olds in their constituencies who will benefit from a reduction in class size: 7,000 in the area that includes the constituency of Chesham and Amersham; 4,000 children in the area that includes the constituency of the shadow Secretary of State; and almost 50 per cent. of the children in Bromley, which includes the constituency of the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

Mrs. Gillan: Will the hon. Lady confirm that there are no assisted places in her constituency, that of the Minister for School Standards or that of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment? Is she not happy to introduce the measure because she knows that it does not affect any of her constituents?

Ms Morris: That comment does not deserve an answer, but I shall answer it.

We were elected to speak for the people of this country, for parents who wanted opportunities for their children and who were fed up with finding that their children were not getting the best chance at infant school because they were in large classes. I have every confidence that what we have said during the Bill's passage will be welcomed by parents and teachers who, like us, want to give a good start to all our children. Our belief in the inherent value of every child, and in the potential of every child to achieve, is different from the values of Conservative Members, which are vested in the potential of only a few children.

If I thought for one minute that the brightest children could not achieve in the state sector, I would not support the Bill. The brightest children can achieve. The children of the Lady's constituents and of those of other hon. Members have gone on to achieve great things. If she had shown the same passion for the state system that she has shown for the independent sector during the Bill's passage, I confidently believe that we would not have inherited a system in chaos.

We speak for parents, for children and for all people who want high standards for everyone. When the Conservatives had the chance to do something about class size, for their constituents or for ours, they did nothing. We will take action. The Bill honours a pledge to the electorate on assisted places. It confirms our determination to make education our highest priority. The resources that it will release will help in our drive to raise standards. It is a good Bill; the House has had the opportunity to consider it; and it will be welcomed by the public. I commend it to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Nine hon. Members wish to make their maiden speeches. May I ask more experienced Members to assist me, because I wish to call as many maiden speakers as possible who have been in the Chamber all day?

7.52 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I thank the Minister for School Standards for his kind words. I apologise for my absence, which was enforced by antibiotics, from Committee last Thursday. To judge from the *Official Report*, there was a thorough discussion, at least by Opposition Members, of some aspects of the Bill's intentions, although there was little clarification of its practical effects from the Government.

It is a matter of regret that the passage of the Bill so far reinforces the somewhat unattractive reputation that the Government have earned in the few short weeks since the general election. They have earned a reputation for seeking to disregard the parliamentary process; for an over-mighty attitude towards the conventions of the House; for a determination to drive through dogma-led policies, regardless of the consequences for individuals, institutions or local education authorities; for an inability on the part of Ministers to answer the simplest of questions about the means by which their ends are to be achieved; and for a reliance instead on the use of soundbites as solutions.

On disregarding the parliamentary process, the Bill was published on the first day of the spring bank holiday recess, when the House was not sitting. The compliance cost assessment was not made available in time for Second Reading. The Government attempted to compress all debate on the Bill into just one and a half days. Information requested through written parliamentary questions was not made available for Committee, truncated as it was, until points of order were raised. To judge from the *Official Report* of Friday's proceedings, a rather irritable business statement had to be wrung out of the Leader of the House so that the Bill could proceed this week.

Mr. Byers: It is important to clarify the point about parliamentary questions. Answers to parliamentary questions can be provided by 3.30 pm at the earliest, and very often, as Government Members who have been in opposition well know, they are often not received until nearer 10 pm. The parliamentary questions to which replies were made last Thursday were handed to Opposition Front Benchers by 4.30 pm at the latest so that they had the information to take part in the debate. It is misleading to say that answers to parliamentary questions should be received at 3.30 pm; it is 3.30 pm at the earliest.

Mrs. Shephard: I was not aware that I had made that point. I merely said that answers to parliamentary questions were not delivered until asked for. The Minister will agree that that is the case.

The Government say that this is only a seven-clause Bill, the implication being that time need not have been devoted to debating it. They also say, and Ministers have reiterated today, that the Bill is very important. We agree, because it is about the principles of freedom and choice

[Mrs. Shephard]

in education. Those words have been curiously absent from the enormous thesaurus of statements of reviews and announcements which have poured out of Ministers' mouths since 2 May. It is significant that, although the Government claim that they attach importance to the Bill, they do not attach so much importance to it that they wanted to have more than a one and a half day debate on it. Nor did they wish that its provisions should be subjected to the proper scrutiny of a full Committee stage upstairs.

To judge from the *Official Report* and from today's proceedings, Government Members are entirely uncritical of the Bill's effects on their constituents, their local education authorities and their maintained schools. They apparently have no questions about when class sizes may be reduced, by how much or by what means. That is fortunate for Ministers, because they have no answers.

Let us turn to the substance and purpose of the Bill. It is designed to reduce choice and opportunity for children from poorer backgrounds who could benefit from a different route through education in a different sort of school. On that we are agreed. The difference between the Opposition and the Government is that we know that choice and variety in education help to drive up standards, while the Government choose to deny it, except in some cases where their own children are concerned. As I said on Second Reading, the Government are motivated by that old Labour principle: if all cannot have, none should. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said on Second Reading that it is a socialist Bill. We agree.

The Government have been unable to explain why they have gone back on the commitment made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle). I do not propose to rehearse the arguments about that, because they were thoroughly debated earlier. I heard what the Secretary of State said. I certainly do not regard him as dishonourable, but it is absolutely clear from the letter of the hon. Member for Walton, who was then one his shadow team, and from the letter sent to a constituent by the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett), that it used to be Labour party policy to allow children to continue with their education until 13. It was a pledge in the clearest terms. It is now equally clear that the pledge will not be honoured. The great question is, given the Secretary of State's emphasis on his discretion, for whom will the promise be kept? That question cannot be answered—like so much else today.

In even more lamentable responses to questioning by Conservative Members, Ministers have been totally unable to explain the following: exactly how much money would be saved from the abolition of the assisted places scheme; when, year by year, the savings would become available; and the discrepancy between their hope for savings of £100 million by the end of the century and the calculations of the Institute of Public Finance of savings of just £34 million, and that is without taking into account the implications for capital spending. They seem, by their silence on the subject, to have declined to place in the House Library a detailed explanation of that discrepancy. Perhaps we can hope for some answers when the Minister for School Standards winds up.

The same airy vagueness surrounds the Government's unsatisfactory responses to the problems of individual local education authorities, which will result from the scheme's abolition. It is clear from the Library research paper that the effect on different LEAs will vary enormously. Perhaps the Minister for School Standards will explain how the Government propose to cope with that.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) asked the Minister for School Standards how many additional primary teachers would be provided from the abolition of the assisted places scheme. His answer was masterly in its character of non-sequitur. No doubt, it was provided by the Department, but it was signed by the Minister, who is smiling—I think that he remembers, therefore. When asked how many additional teachers would be provided from the abolition of the assisted places scheme, he replied:

"It will be for individual LEAs to judge what adjustments will be needed to primary teacher numbers to ensure smaller classes."

I am sure that he will explain how it is that, somehow or another, one of them signed the wrong answer to the right question.

I suggest to the Minister that LEAs will be interested to know how much money is coming to them from the abolition of the assisted places scheme, when and in what form. I suggest to LEAs that they should not hold their collective breath—they are not likely to get an answer.

With her customary passion, which I respect, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris), has expressed on a number of occasions her firm belief that the Bill will help all children. If that is her belief and that of her colleagues, is it not time that we had some answers on how? Labour Members have on many occasions employed the soundbite—or something like it—that the Bill is intended to benefit the many at the expense of the few. The hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands), who is not in his place, seemed to have swallowed that argument.

If that is the view of Ministers, surely they should by now have at least some hazy idea of how they intend the many to benefit. Can they say when the savings will be made—in which academic year—and how many additional primary teachers can be appointed and when? Can they announce a target for the reduction in the size of primary classes? Can they say if, and how, they would ring-fence the money for LEAs? Can they say if they would impose from the centre standard admission arrangements? Can they say how parental choice would be maintained, although I see that that would hardly be their priority? Can they describe how an appeals procedure would have to be changed?

The truth of the matter is that the House is being asked to agree to the destruction of the assisted places scheme, the destruction of choice and opportunity for children whose parents want them to take that route and the destruction of excellence in order, to use the Minister's words, to benefit the many when they do not have the least idea how to bring that benefit about.

The Government have cynically sought to limit debate and to disregard the conventions of the House in order not to reveal the fact that they cannot deliver the

improvements that they have promised. The Bill is dictated by class envy and dogma. It is destructive of choice and excellence. It will not work, and we oppose it.

8.3 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): As the newly elected Member for Waveney, I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech on a subject that is dear to my heart and to follow the right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), in whose county I have taught for the past 11 years.

Waveney is distinguished by being the most easterly constituency in the United Kingdom and I have the honour of being the second Labour Member to be elected in the history of the constituency, which was formerly known as Lowestoft. Edward Evans was the first Labour Member, and he served from 1945 to 1959. He is still fondly remembered as a kind, caring and dedicated Member of Parliament.

Following my success on 1 May, I was delighted to receive a letter of congratulation and support from the chairman of Adnams, the fine Suffolk brewers and wine merchants, especially as he reminded me that his grandfather, Pierce Loftus, was the Member of Parliament for Lowestoft between 1934 and 1945, although he was a Conservative.

Probably the most famous Member to represent Waveney is the present Lord Prior, who is held in the highest regard even among many Labour voters. I pay tribute also to my predecessor, David Porter, who was a diligent constituency Member. He was proud to represent the area in which he was born and grew up and, as hon. Members will know, he spoke out regularly for the fishing industry. We have lived near each other for 10 years—I as his councillor and he as my Member of Parliament. It is a tribute to him that, despite being adversaries for so long, it was easy to maintain a courteous and dignified relationship, which extended to a reasonably civilised election campaign.

Waveney—when one finds out where it is—contains the main town of Lowestoft, which is immediately associated with fishing, but there is so much more to our area. Indeed, we want to correct the image of a declining fishing industry. Lowestoft is Britain's most easterly point. That is not as widely known as it should be, and the local district council, which I have had the privilege of leading for the past six years, has been making efforts to try to emulate Land's End in both visitor numbers and the economic benefits that such visitors will bring.

Lowestoft has the best beach in England. That is official, because it won the competition organised by the English tourist board in 1991—the fact that the competition has not been held since is fortuitous for our town. We also have the beautiful Oulton broad, which is part of the Broads national park.

Industry is important too. Our geographical position marks Lowestoft as Britain's most easterly port, pointing straight at Europe, with the opportunities that that could bring us. It is also home to the southern fields headquarters of Shell. Bird's Eye and Sanyo are also located in the town.

Beccles is in the constituency. It is a Suffolk market town of real character, with historic buildings and a riverside quay on the Waveney, which gives the constituency its name. Recently, Beccles had new fame, being the home town of the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Bell). The people of Beccles were full of congratulations for his victory.

Bungay is another historic market town with a castle. Two or three weeks ago, it celebrated the election of its first mayor. It is also home to the printing press that printed the Prime Minister's book, last year.

Overall, Waveney has a most pleasant environment, hence the recent marketing slogan for industry, "Room to breathe". The people of Waveney are as loyal and hard-working as one will find anywhere, yet, unfortunately, they suffer the blight of high and sustained unemployment. Waveney is often called the black spot of East Anglia. Unemployment has been double the regional average for 15 years. The people there are fed up. They ask, "Why us?"

Once Waveney was a thriving area, with shipbuilding, fishing, engineering and canning. Many hon. Members will remember that Waveney was the trademark on the Co-op cans that they bought some years ago. Those industries have gone, but they have not been replaced because of the absence of modern transport links to a remote and peripheral location. The roads to Lowestoft are poor and the railways are worse. Lowestoft is cursed by a lift-up bridge on the trunk road in the middle of the town, which is raised more than 13 times each day, bringing commercial activity to a standstill—I believe, a unique situation in the country.

The people in Waveney feel neglected and left behind by the failure of Government to modernise transport in our corner of the country. They will be looking to the new Government to rectify that. I intend to pursue the cause vigorously in the House.

The youngsters in Waveney are not badly educated. Despite enforced cuts, Suffolk county council has done its best to maintain funding above the standard spending assessment level. Parents and pupils generally respect schools and teachers, who in turn are proud of their achievements. But there is also a feeling that education in my constituency could be much better, and my constituents welcome the Government's crusade to raise standards. They are enormously relieved that a stable comprehensive system, brought in by a Conservative county council many years ago, will not be disrupted by the introduction of grammar schools and the extension of education vouchers beyond the nursery phase.

I have just entered Parliament after 25 years as a teacher in secondary and high schools. I know from my experience that when pupils enter secondary education at 11 or 12 with unsolved literacy or numeracy problems—when they have fallen behind—it is usually too late to remedy the situation. Sadly, experience shows that the likelihood of them catching up is not good. It is all too often a tragic story of continued weakness, low achievement and, sometimes, a failure to gain any qualifications—in short, it is a waste of human potential.

The Government are therefore right to concentrate on the early years. The Bill's targeting of resources on the early years in order to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds puts the money where it will be of most benefit. It will also complement the provision of more nursery places, using the money that was wasted on voucher bureaucracy.

[Mr. Bob Blizzard]

Class size does count—my experience tells me that, all teachers know it and more and more parents know it. As parents spend more time helping in schools, they see for themselves that class size is important. Pupils also know that class size matters. When a youngster remarks on a day when many children are off school with 'flu, "It's nice in here today, sir," he is making a statement on class size. Large numbers in class mean that space can run out and discipline and safety standards can deteriorate.

Some people try to deny that class size makes a difference, but those same people defend small classes in the schools to which pupils are sent under the assisted places scheme. As we have heard, some hon. Members mourn the demise of the assisted places scheme, but even they know that resources are finite and we have to make the best use of them. It is sensible and fair to spend resources on the many, not the few. That policy also meets the needs of the nation at the end of the century. Our nation no longer needs simply an educated elite, with many less well-educated manual workers, as happened in the 1950s. Times have changed.

When I consider my education, I realise that I had an assisted place, although it was not called that. I attended a direct grant school and was referred to as someone from a less advantaged background. My father's only connection with the school was that he did some of the signwriting on the honours boards. I know that I had a good education at that school, and I have analysed what made it good. Was it the teachers? I have seen many teachers over 25 years, and when I consider my teachers I realise that some were good, some were ordinary and some were not very good at all. Was it the facilities? There were excellent sports facilities, but facilities in the classroom were not special. Was it the books? No. There were plenty of dog-eared books with broken spines. What made my—assisted place—education good was the fact that the class sizes were small.

It is fitting that the Government will use state money from the assisted places scheme to reduce class sizes for so many children. There is something wrong if a Government, charged with the responsibility for state education, simply say that they cannot provide for the brightest pupils in that sector and instead rely on the private sector. That sort of Government do not believe in the state system. People expect better of a Government and this Government will do better. That is why I support the Bill.

8.13 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am grateful to be called to make my maiden speech. I shall begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard)—he has the great advantage over me of having overcome the hurdle of the maiden speech. I hope that at the end of my speech I shall have done as well as he did, although I do not have the advantage of his many years as a teacher.

I was, however, for some years involved in the former Department of Education and Science as a special adviser; I played a part in the creation of the assisted places scheme, which the present Government are undoing. Despite that, I had not intended to make my maiden speech, or to intervene, in the current demolition job on the assisted places scheme. As someone who has been involved in and concerned with education for many years, I thought that it was an open question. I did not know whether the good done by reducing class sizes, which I believe is a matter of importance, would outweigh the advantages of the assisted places scheme. For reasons that I hope to explain, having listened to the debates during the Bill's Committee stage, I have become persuaded that it is imperative for the country to realise what is happening.

I shall begin with some uncontroversial remarks, as I believe that that is traditional with maiden speeches. The part of the country that I am lucky enough to represent—West Dorset—is, without question and notwithstanding many comments to the contrary in other maiden speeches that I have heard in the past few weeks, the loveliest part of the loveliest county in England. The grandeur of the coast from Abbotsbury to Lyme Regis is unsurpassed, as is the beauty of the hills that stretch from Dorchester in the south to Sherborne in the north.

West Dorset is a part of England that is old England—where tradition is appropriately mingled with enterprise and where children attend fine schools, both maintained and independent. The vast majority of those children grow into responsible citizens who make a contribution to the community. It is a part of England where the voluntary sector flourishes. I speak not only of charities and other activities often referred to under that heading, but of the vast multitude of cultural, sporting and other activities in which people participate on a voluntary basis. They participate in those activities because they know each other, care about each other and like to act together. It is a part of England where there is, in the proper sense, a community—something which, I fear and regret, is missing from many other parts of the country.

I shall make another uncontroversial remark: West Dorset, beautiful, prosperous and pleasant as it is, has had the luck to be represented for the past 23 years by an outstanding constituency Member of Parliament, Sir James Spicer. Jim Spicer was held in high esteem on both sides of the House, not least because of his robust defence of democracy in the Westminster Foundation and elsewhere and for the contribution that he made to the physical well-being of Members of Parliament through his immense contribution to the gymnastics performed in the House of Commons gym.

It was not in the House that Jim was, above all, prized—it has been an extraordinary undertaking for me to replace him as Member of Parliament for West Dorset, where he was held not just in esteem, but in tremendous affection. It was extraordinary to find, throughout the length and breadth of the constituency, that many people who voted for parties other than the Conservative party believed that Jim was an unparalleled constituency Member of Parliament. I repeatedly came across people to whom he had given help, tirelessly and effectively. It is therefore with some humility that I inherit his seat.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, I had not intended to participate in the debate. I understood the motive behind the abolition of the assisted places scheme to be the recouping of money to be used to reduce class sizes. In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) tabled two new clauses that were rejected by the ministerial team. We were told that where additional money was available—for example, from a charity—Ministers did not intend to allow a local

authority that wished to send a child to an independent school to benefit from a unit of standard spending assessment. When the Minister of State said that, I wondered whether the House or indeed the Minister and his officials realised how devastating a hole it blew in the argument about recouping money.

A child who is currently benefiting from an assisted place and who moves into the maintained sector on the abolition of that place will cost roughly the standard spending assessment. If the local authority is not allowed to spend that money because the child still attends an independent school, albeit supported by an outside source with an amount equal to the difference between the maintained sector cost and the independent school cost, it cannot be the Bill's intention to recoup money. There must be another motive.

As a Conservative Member, I am perhaps unusual in hoping that the new Labour party has genuinely learned the lesson of the past 18 years and converted to the proposition that is of immense value to our democracy: that there is no longer any merit in fighting ideological battles or in making education the ground for such battles. I was sorely disappointed by the Minister of State's response, because it showed that the Bill has an ideological aim. It is designed not to recoup moneys to reduce class sizes but to end a scheme which, for ideological reasons, is regarded by the Government and their supporters as objectionable.

That in itself is a retrograde step, and it augurs ill for an issue of even greater moment which, I trust, will shortly come to the House—if in their august majesty the Government deign to bring such matters before the House. I refer to grant-maintained schools, about which the Government have vouchsafed the House and the country little information. If on that matter the Government are driven by the same ideological concerns and dogmatic intentions that have driven them on this issue, it will be sad for the country, for the Labour party, which I thought had grown out of such ways of conducting business, and for our children. I am grateful for being called to speak in the debate.

8.22 pm

Mr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I am grateful for this opportunity to make my maiden speech. I congratulate the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on an excellent maiden speech, some of which I agreed with. I especially agreed with his comments about the beauty of his constituency. I have spent many weekends in the Lyme Regis area and I can vouch for the accuracy of his remarks. I hope that the next time the hon. Gentleman sees me sitting on the Cobb at Lyme Regis he will, in a spirit of inter-party friendliness, buy me a cup of tea.

Some 130 years ago, John Ruskin spoke about the duty of the state. He said:

"the first duty of a State is to see that every child born therein shall be well housed, clothed, fed and educated till it attain years of discretion."

That is a good yardstick by which to judge the government of the United Kingdom. How are we to do that, and how well are we doing 130 years on from Ruskin in terms of my constituency and my city of Southampton? I cannot say hand on heart that, if John Ruskin visited us now, he would say that we had succeeded. What would he make of our homelessness and of the gross inequality in educational opportunity that we tolerate, although we have the technical and organisational capacity to realise Ruskin's vision?

Hampshire and Southampton are by no means the worst areas of the country in terms of educational opportunity, but 25 per cent. of Hampshire's infant schools and 30 per cent. of its infant and junior schools have classes of more than 30. In Southampton, 1,221 infant school pupils and 2,123 junior school pupils are being educated in classes of more than 30. Whatever we think about the arguments on the quality of teaching, common sense tells us that the larger the class the less the individual attention, particularly in the early years. That means that pupils are more likely to under achieve.

As a child of the state system and the father of two children who attend the comprehensive school nearest to my home, I am passionately concerned to ensure that the state system works in the best interests of everybody. Class sizes are important, and their reduction will make a difference even if in the beginning the classes are only a little smaller. I was astonished by some of the speeches of Conservative Members on Second Reading, particularly that of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), who suggested that we should reduce class sizes only if the reductions are huge. He said that we could keep assisted places because the difference that their abolition would make to class sizes would not be very great.

The true import of that statement is revealed by changing some of the characters. It is like saying that a small increase in the number of policemen on the beat would not make an enormous difference to crime; only a huge increase would have that effect. Therefore, it is said, we should keep many police on one or two estates so that at least a few people can have a good quality of life and be free from crime. That example may help us to understand what Conservative Members are talking about.

Much about the Opposition's case is suspect. They quote the case advanced by the Institute of Public Finance in its 1996 paper on reducing class sizes. I am not sure how many Opposition Members have read that paper. The assumption is that the only saving that is available to the Government is the difference between the aggregate cost of an assisted place and the aggregate cost of a secondary school place. Using that calculation, the savings will amount to only £13 million in 1998-99. It is interesting to note that, by the end of the Government's first term, even the IPF suggests that they will be only £16 million short of their target if they use the aggregate amount that is saved by abolishing the assisted places scheme to reduce class sizes of five, six and seven-year-olds.

The Government say that those figures are incorrect. In a written reply on 22 May, it was stated that there are 800,000 empty places in existing LEA provision. Therefore, there is ample scope to accommodate pupils without assisted places. Who is right? The Minister's case seems to be strong, and we can carry out a test by examining the number of assisted places per local education authority. The hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) spoke about that. A more accurate picture can be obtained by using places in counties as the yardstick, because many people in London boroughs and metropolitan boroughs who take up assisted places come from outside those areas.

[Mr. Alan Whitehead]

As we have heard, the discrepancies are huge. People in some parts of the country are more likely to gain access to assisted places than people in areas where there are few such places. That in itself is a scandal, and anyone who attempts to defend assisted places must explain the enormous disparity in the availability of assisted places in different parts of the country. A written answer of 27 January reveals the interesting fact that, even if we take, county by county, the number of places presently provided by the assisted places scheme and set that against the number of vacancies county by county, not in one case is the number of places potentially lost by the scheme anywhere near the number of vacancies. Therefore, even on a local level, the numbers can be accommodated within the state system at very little additional cost. The IPF figures are simply wrong; the savings are not as it suggests, and they are far more likely to be close to what my hon. Friend the Minister suggests.

I like to think that Southampton is a city of educational opportunity. It is certainly a centre for business. It has enormous European connections, a fine university and a thriving institute of higher education. One in seven citizens of Southampton is a student. Its port has links with the whole world. Its football team generously lets in goals to visitors the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, although it sometimes scores itself.

Oddly enough, the city was represented by my namesake, Colonel Whitehead, between 1642 and 1644. In between his parliamentary duties, he besieged and captured Bishops Waltham palace, which was, I suppose, an early example of business interests outside one's parliamentary duties. The city was also represented, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by your illustrious predecessor, Dr. Horace King, later Lord Maybray King. In his maiden speech in the House in March 1950, he spent much time describing the devastation wrought on Southampton by the blitz. I have not, of course, had to endure such trials. Instead I have lived for almost 30 years in a rapidly changing and prospering city that has been kind and generous to me. I hope that I can repay some of that by my endeavours here on its behalf.

You will also recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my predecessor Sir James Hill for his particular hard work in chairing many Commons Committees as a member of the Chairmen's Panel. I understand that he was an habitué of the many fine restaurants in the House, only some of which I have discovered so far. I wish him a long and healthy retirement from politics and thank him for his work on behalf of my city.

In a recent debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) said that Oscar Wilde lived in Reading under enforced conditions for some time, but I discovered recently that, for some years, he lived freely of his own accord in a house on the edge of Southampton common. He is not just a pretty epigrammatist. In an essay in 1895 entitled "Socialism and the Soul of Man", he made a profound description of the many and the few:

> "Socialism will be of value simply because it will lead to individualism. Under the new conditions individualism will be far freer, far finer and far more intensified than it is now. I am not talking of the great actual individualism of such poets as I have mentioned, but of the great actual individualism latent and potential in mankind generally."

As I have illustrated, the socialism that Oscar Wilde proclaimed considered all human potential: not just the dazzling achievements of the few, but the unleashing of the potential of the many.

I cannot find a better vision of the socialism of the Government I believe in than the observations of Ruskin and Wilde. However, the figures that I have quoted on the children denied the opportunity to make the best of their individuality bear witness against that vision. We have a choice and I am proud to make my maiden speech in this debate to advocate that choice—to keep the faith, albeit in a small way, with the vision of potential in everyone, which we in society can unlock, instead of giving privileges to some children while allowing others to fall by the wayside. I know what I want for the children of Southampton. That is why I have been proud to support the Bill.

8.34 pm

Mr. Boswell: It is my pleasant duty, on behalf of colleagues, to thank the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Mr. Whitehead). His maiden speech contained some light touches about the city that he is clearly proud to represent and, in its substance, reflected a degree of preparation and passion that we shall remember and note. May I also be the first from the Conservative Benches to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on his speech. He showed a remarkable blend of both fluency and cogency in advancing his argument.

Clearly the Government may claim a mandate for the passage of the Bill, but just because they claim a mandate does not mean that it is of itself sensible. I advise the House to reject its Third Reading tonight. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and others have spoken both this evening and earlier of the Bill's flaws. I sum them up simply by saying that it displays misplaced opportunism and suggests that the problems that our schools have undoubtedly faced and continue to face will, in some way, be solved by the Bill's passage. It is dangling a false and shining prospectus before us.

The Bill contains neither the adequate financial means nor the mechanism to secure the class size reductions and the improvements of standards that Labour and indeed Conservative Members want. The substance of the Bill is very much less about class size and, sadly, reverts to the class war, but rather than go on about the overall sweep of the Bill, I should like to leave the House with one or two points for it to consider.

In my speeches in Committee, I have emphasised both the Bill's impact on individuals—on parents and pupils—and, to some extent, the institutional impact. I am concerned—I say this after receiving a sensitive and, in certain respects, helpful response from the Under-Secretary—that the way the Bill is structured will still create problems for individuals at age 11, who will find themselves caught in the transition from private education through the assisted places scheme to the maintained sector when they would typically have expected to remain in their prep school until the age of 13.

That is a human problem. The Minister sought to justify it by saying that she felt and had received advice that the settling in for those children would be less traumatic at age 11 than at 13. Clearly, that was not the view of her

colleague, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), a former shadow education spokesman, who made his views clear in his pledge to the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools and later in April. However, whether it is her view or not, the House needs to consider the views of parents and the interests of the children.

I hope that, either in subsequent consideration of the Bill in another place, in regulations or at least in advice to local education authorities, the Government will bring forward the principles that, first, the interests of the child, the individual pupil, should be paramount and, secondly, that parents' views should be taken into account by the Secretary of State in exercising his discretion on when the transfer should take place or assisted places funding should be withdrawn.

That is the personal and human side of this, but I should like to close on the Bill's overall impact. Last week, I told the House that I was concerned that, just as the move to comprehensive schools in the 1960s and 1970s, however well intentioned, had driven apart the state and private sectors of education, the Bill too ran that risk.

The hon. Member for Walton has featured extensively in our debates. I have already referred to his pledge. He has been the Banquo's ghost of the Committee stage, Report and Third Reading. One thing that he was quoted as saying, however, struck me as interesting; I hope that it is an earnest of the Government's intentions. He was quoted as saying that he wanted to build bridges to the private sector. I agree with that, but I fear that the Bill may build wedges dividing the state and private sectors rather than bridges linking them.

I do not claim that the private sector has a monopoly of wisdom, although it has many fine schools. It has a strong commitment to education; it often has the involvement of paying parents, as well as those benefiting from assisted places schemes. Those are great strengths, along with the other strengths that the Government will no doubt wish to advance. The sector also has the ability to innovate, and to be a little more flexible in its approach not only to the most able children but, on occasion, to the less able. On the other hand, it must surely benefit both sectors if they talk to each other and associate with each other, especially in view of the number of children who move from one sector to another in the normal course of their schooling. I consider that both socially right and educationally appropriate.

My major worry about the Bill is that it is overselling its achievement—its ability to resource other changes designed to improve the quality of state education—and driving a wedge between the state and private sectors. I feel that the Government owe it to the House to listen to the points that were raised on Committee, and to reflect on them before the Bill is passed. Even if we believe that the Bill will go through untrammelled, and that it will damage the private sector, it will be an earnest of the Government's good intentions if they reflect on the damage that they have done and seek to repair it by trying wherever possible to bring together the private and public education sectors.

8.41 pm

Ms Margaret Moran (Luton, South): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech in this important debate. As the first woman Member of Parliament for Luton, South, I must first thank all the voters in that constituency for the trust that they have placed in me and in our new Labour Government.

I speak as one who trained as a teacher, and also as a governor of two Luton schools, Cardinal Newman and Denbigh infants and junior school. In the latter capacity, I can certainly attest to the enthusiasm of teachers, governors and parents for our proposals to phase out the assisted places scheme to honour our pledge to reduce class sizes—but I shall say more about that shortly.

When researching my predecessor, Sir Graham Bright, I was fascinated to learn that it was one of his teachers who introduced him to politics. Although I cannot agree with his political direction, I believe that all our children should be given the same opportunity. Sir Graham Bright was perhaps best known as the parliamentary private secretary of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major). I know that they are firm friends, and I am sure that they will both spend their new-found leisure time enjoying cricket—all the more so, no doubt, since our national team's new-found success under a new Labour Government.

The name of Ivor Clemitson is still well known because of his love of Luton, which I share. I am sure that he would share my anger about the fact that a men's magazine called *For Him* this week dubbed Luton the worst town in the country. I intend to start an "I love Luton" campaign to correct that unfair and untrue slur on our town.

I would say to the magazine's contributors, "Get a life!" They should try visiting Luton's carnival. Second only to the Notting Hill carnival, it is the work of Luton's council, its schools, play groups and clubs and its many voluntary organisations, which make it a spectacle not to be missed. Alternatively, they should try visiting Luton's newly extended airport. Made infamous by Lorraine Chase—with whom I share only a gorblimey accent—it is now the United Kingdom's fastest-growing airport.

I know from listening to many of my hon. Friends' excellent maiden speeches that it is traditional at this point to conduct a comprehensive political Cook's tour of one's constituency, but I intend to break that tradition. Instead, I want to pay tribute to Luton's greatest treasure, her residents.

We celebrate a diverse community, which includes many generations of Lutonians, some of whom are still in the traditional hat industry. It also includes two large communities—to one of which I am proud to belong—who share a history of coming from beautiful but sad and divided lands. I refer to Ireland and Kashmir. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for their energy and commitment to achieving peace in those troubled lands.

Luton's many peoples went there looking for work—for instance, the Welshmen who walked there in the 1930s, and my dad—to whom I owe a debt of honour—who found his first job after arriving from Ireland at Vauxhall Luton. Sadly, Luton's once-expanding manufacturing and car industries are now much smaller, but I am delighted that the IBC-Renault deal is likely to bring another 900 much-needed jobs to the area. Many of those will be skilled jobs, and Luton's prosperity depends on a well-skilled work force. That is why the Bill is so important to us: the skilled work force of the future requires a well-educated community today.

[Ms Margaret Moran]

I listened carefully to the arguments of Opposition Members as they opposed the Bill and described the iniquities of the phasing out of assisted places schemes. I dispute some of the amounts that they cited when they spoke of the cost of those schemes. I understand that assisted places fees can range from £4,000 to £9,000 per pupil.

If Opposition Members want to know the impact that such figures would have in schools, I simply ask them to visit one of the schools in my constituency, such as Dallow infants and junior school, which I visited recently. They should come and meet Nazia, who might be a typical pupil. As with 90 per cent. of her classmates, English is her second language; her elder brothers are unemployed, like one in five of all young men in the area. She, or one in four of her friends, will return to a home that is unfit, in disrepair or overcrowded. If she is lucky, she will have a yard to play in but no garden. Nazia is in a class of 37 pupils and, try as her dedicated teachers might, they struggle to give her and her classmates the attention that they need to have a real head start.

Dallow is a good school. It has dedicated staff, governors and parents, and they deserve better. Reducing class sizes for Dallow, and for other Luton schools, will allow teachers to raise educational standards and to give Nazia and her friends real opportunities.

Let me make a final, impassioned plea—that we use the opportunities afforded by the Bill to raise standards not just in the three Rs, but in the use of information technology. Nazia will face a world of work and training in which information technology will be further advanced than we can possibly imagine, but she has no computer at home. Many schools rely on the sheer enthusiasm of staff, and on supermarket vouchers and other such schemes, for the IT equipment that they need. Yet access to technology in the 21st century will be as important as access to books in the 20th century.

I hope that we shall use the wonderful opportunities that the Bill provides, perhaps working with business, to champion the wider use of technology, so as to open up all the new world of work, of communications, of citizenship and of training for Nazia and her friends into the 21st century.

8.49 pm

Mrs. May: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on the generality of the Bill. In Committee, the hon. Member for Wallsend told us about some lessons that he had learned—

Ms Estelle Morris *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. May: I do apologise, as a new Member, if I have got the name of the hon. Gentleman's constituency wrong. The hon. Member for whatever the constituency was—

Ms Morris: Tyneside, North.

Mrs. May: The hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) gave us the benefit of advice that he had received at an early stage from his father about Conservatives. That set me thinking about the lessons that I had learnt at an early stage about the difference between socialism and Conservatism.

Socialism is about levelling down. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Conservatism is about levelling up. [HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] Socialists believe that, if everyone cannot have something, no one shall. Conservatives reject that. Socialism destroys opportunity, whereas Conservatism builds up opportunity.

We have been told that the present Labour Government will be different, because the Government are new Labour and new Labour is different. Sadly, the Bill shows how wrong that claim is, because it is a socialist Bill—not my words, but those of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I suggest that he is better able to judge than I am.

This is a socialist Bill, because it destroys opportunity instead of providing it. Ministers have defended the Bill on the ground that the Government will govern for the many, not for the few. The Bill, abolishing the assisted places scheme, does nothing to improve the education of the many, but it does much to destroy educational opportunities for a few.

In her opening remarks, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Ms Morris)—I hope that I have at least managed to get that one correct—

Ms Estelle Morris *indicated assent.*

Mrs. May: The hon. Lady said that the Government spoke for parents who want opportunities for their children. I can only assume that she and her colleagues have not met Geraldine Ewan—a teacher in my Maidenhead constituency, who was interviewed for an article in the *Maidenhead Advertiser* last week. The article said:

"Geraldine's passion for the Assisted Places Scheme is born out of hard experience.

Ten years ago she was living on social security with children officially classified as 'gifted' and in need of special education.

'If it wasn't for assisted places my children would not have got the education they needed,' she says . . .

The Labour Government's actions to repeal the scheme puzzle Mrs. Ewan.

'What's so strange about abolishing it is that I would have thought the Labour Party was interested in breaking down class barriers and that's exactly what assisted places do'."

I have spoken to Mrs. Ewan. She told me about her children. Six children have benefited from the assisted places scheme. She told me about the children who have been to university, the subjects that they have read and those who are currently doing A-levels. She described the assisted places scheme as "a lifeline to us" and said that she could not understand why the Government were "kicking the vulnerable", because abolition of the scheme is hurting the children.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): You must be joking.

Mrs. May: That is what a lady with several children who have benefited from the assisted places scheme has told me, and the remarks that hon. Members are making from a sedentary position are extremely unfortunate.

As Mrs. Ewan is a primary school teacher in my constituency, I spoke to her about class sizes. She is worried about primary school class sizes, especially because she is concerned with the needs of gifted children and believes that they can be given the challenge that they need only in small classes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] She, and the head teacher of the primary school at which she teaches, do not believe that the Bill will reduce classes at that school, because they do not believe that the money is sufficient to improve class sizes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] They also doubt whether the money will be forthcoming.

The reactions that I am receiving are interesting, because the point about Mrs. Ewan's case is that her children were classified as gifted and they were able to get the education that they deserved because of the opportunity that was given to her, a parent on social security, to have her children provided with the best education that they could get, through the assisted places scheme. It is unfortunate that Labour Members are not interested in providing opportunities for children and ensuring that they get the education that is right for them.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) eloquently pointed out, the Bill's great failure is the fact that it does nothing to put into place the other side of the equation that the Government claim is in their mandate.

Of the few Labour Members who have spoken during the Bill's passage, some have spoken passionately about what they believe to be the genuine need to reduce class sizes. The speech in Committee by the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) was an especially passionate call for money to reduce class sizes.

However, I say to those hon. Members and to the House that the Bill does nothing to reduce class sizes in our primary schools. It does not provide the mechanism that will ensure that money goes to primary schools to reduce class sizes. It does not even show us the mechanism whereby money will be given to local education authorities, and we all know the problems of getting money from local education authorities into schools—except in the case of Conservative-controlled authorities, such as Wokingham, which, I am pleased to say, having moved from Liberal Democrat control to the Conservatives, as a unitary authority will now pass on a higher percentage of its education budget to schools.

I welcome such decisions, but the Bill provides no extra money to schools to pay for the extra teachers or buildings that may be necessary if some schools are to reduce class sizes. It is pulling the wool over the eyes of the electorate, but it is not pulling the wool over the eyes of teachers.

I refer Labour Members to comments made by the National Association of Head Teachers, which has said that the Bill will not provide sufficient money to provide the number of teachers and buildings that are necessary to produce reductions in class sizes of the order that is being talked about.

All the Bill will do is to destroy opportunity. It will do nothing to improve the education of the many, and it will do much to reduce the quality of education of children who benefit from assisted places. If the Government had had their way, Mrs. Ewan's children would not have been able to benefit from schemes such as assisted places. If the Government had had their way, Mrs. Ewan's children would not have had the education that they deserved. The Government are not governing for the many or for the few, they are governing as a socialist Government. It is about time that Conservative Members ensured that people understand exactly what the Bill is about.

8.58 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I should like to praise the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran), who represents a town that has much in common with my constituency of Slough—apart from the fact that Slough's airport is rather larger than Luton's. The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) spoke passionately in claiming that the Bill is kicking away opportunity from people, but that is rich coming from a supporter of a Government who, for 19 years, stamped on children's opportunities to get the best of their education in towns such as Slough.

It is traditional in a maiden speech to say nice things about one's predecessors, but, for me, doing so will be not a duty but a pleasure. I sought the Labour nomination for the Slough constituency because I knew that, if there were a queue of parliamentarians that included Joan Lester and Fenner Brockway, I jolly well wanted to be in it. I knew Fenner when he was frail and elderly, and occasionally I made the mistake of telling him, "Take care, Fenner." He would reply, "Don't take care—LIVE!" I only hope that, in representing the town of Slough, I have the same boldness, courage and principle that distinguished both of those former hon. Members. I am very proud that Joan has followed Fenner into the other place, where I know that she will distinguish its debates, particularly on the issue of children, which we are debating today.

My most immediate predecessor, John Watts, belonged to the Conservative party, but I know from my constituents how hard he worked on their behalf, especially when they were embroiled in the travails of Britain's immigration law. I am very pleased that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department has already started to unravel some of the most unfair aspects of those rules.

John Watts had close relationships with many of the diverse communities in Slough, and I know that some of them were very disappointed when he went off on—as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions calls it—"the chicken run." Unfortunately in John Watts's case, he ran into a fox's lair. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Ms Griffiths) on occupying what John Watts had hoped would be his place.

Slough is one of the few towns in the south-east which, despite 18 years of decline in manufacturing industry, still makes things, such as Mars bars, Badedas bath products and Dulux paints. Everyone has used something made in my town. Although jobs in many of our traditional industries are gone, we pioneer new technologies and are proud to be the gateway to Britain's silicon valley.

The work available in Slough has made it a town of immigrants—from south Wales, the north-east, Poland, Ireland, Punjab and Kashmir—who have travelled to Slough in search of work and a better life. For their children, education is the key to that better life. The assisted places scheme, however, does not give most of those children the key.

We have heard about how assisted places are regionally unequally distributed, but we have not heard about the degree to which most children who benefit from the

[Fiona Mactaggart]

scheme already have educational advantage within their families. More than two thirds of those pupils' mothers have themselves received a private or selective education, and their mothers are four times as likely as members of the general population to have an A-level. It is also not true that the assisted places scheme is the only way in which to achieve quality in education. In my county of Berkshire, more than 25 of the comprehensives have better A-level results than Pangbourne college, for example, as do my grammar schools in Slough.

The wonderful thing about the Bill is that the money that will be saved will benefit pupils in their youngest years in education, and investing in something that will take such a long time to repay shows the Government's courage. Who will benefit from such long-term investment? Every infant in a class of over 30 will benefit. I cannot list all the schools in Slough which have such classes, but they include Wexham Court combined, Cippenham Infants', Priory, Ryvers, Holy Family, Marish, St. Mary's, St. Anthony's and many others.

Teachers also will benefit from the Bill's provisions. I have been a primary teacher in an inner-city school, and I remember how much more exhausted I was in the year in which my class numbers increased by five pupils over the previous year. I also know how much better I did my job when I was teaching 24 children. Earlier this year, I was visiting the Lea school, in Slough, and a journalist asked a teacher at the school how she would vote. She simply said, "I am a teacher." For her, the choice was obvious, because no self-respecting teacher could vote for the Conservative party, which has shown such contempt for teachers' talents and efforts.

Our new Labour Government are already working with teachers. The letter that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State sent to schools and colleges emphasising that every school was good at something and that, in order to deliver high standards in education, we depended on working in partnership with teachers, was very welcome, and it has done much to provide the foundation for our initiatives.

I will tell the House about the reception class in one infant school in Chalvey which I know well. It has 28 five-year-olds in it, many of whom live in overcrowded homes with parents who are on low incomes. Twenty-five of those 28 five-year-olds can already do something that I, with many years of expensive education, cannot; they can communicate in two languages.

Children with English as a second language, however, are less likely to have access to reading materials and English at home, and they tend to perform below their ability in reading tests. I hope that the initiatives that we are taking to invest in the early years of education will provide those children, at the time when they can most benefit from it, with the key to open the educational doors which have been closed to them until now.

It is not just teachers and children but all of us who will benefit from our initiatives. Research such as the Perri/High Scope work in the United States shows that, for every £1 spent on the early years of education, we save £6 later in preventing crime and in remedial education.

Schools in my constituency are showing other ways in which the infant school can contribute to a harmonious community. Our Lady of Peace infants school uses its close links with parents to run an excellent parenting education class. As the consultation document "Preventing Children Offending" issued by the previous Government showed, such initiatives contribute not only to a happy home but to keeping children out of trouble. I commend them to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

Crime and youth disorder have brought Slough to the headlines. I dispute the *Daily Mail* claim that a "culture of violence" pervades our Britwell estate, but it is certainly true that many living there have been victims of violent crime, which has more than doubled since 1979. We need action that works on that issue. Young people themselves, including those who have been involved in violence in the streets of Slough, know what kind of action is needed. When asked by their peers, something like one in five of them said that the priority for action was improving their educational opportunities.

Many of our Government's plans focus on human rights. I commend to my Front-Bench colleagues one human right that will never be written into law, but which we have a responsibility to deliver. I refer to the right to read. The Bill is a crucial step on the road to delivering that right. Smaller infant classes and early intervention for children who do not do well with reading are the first steps to delivering the right to read.

If those children do learn to read, they may use their skills to read the poem by John Betjeman which seems to encapsulate the public view of Slough. I wonder, however, how many hon. Members have read beyond the invitation to the friendly bombs to destroy my town. The poem goes on to condemn the lecherous business men and to lament the ignorance of the clerk who makes his profits and drinks in the bars—mock-Tudor bars, as I recall—of the constituency of the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), but who dares not look up and see the stars.

Slough's great astronomer, Herschel, used a telescope to see the stars, but the stars of hope and ambition are revealed to most of us through the power of the written word. The Bill will mean that more children can raise their sights, achieve more for themselves and achieve more for our society. I commend it to the House.

Mrs. May: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the hon. Member for Luton, South (Ms Moran) who made her maiden speech before I spoke. I completely failed to congratulate her on it, which was bad manners on my part. I congratulate her on it now and say that, if the quality of her speech is anything to go by, she will be an excellent advocate for Luton.

9.8 pm

Mr. Thomas Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) on her excellent maiden speech. She could have mentioned ICI Paints of Slough, a company for which I worked in the past.

I thank the electors of Carshalton and Wallington for electing me and for putting their trust in me, as other hon. Members have thanked their electors.

Let me mention my predecessor, Nigel Forman, who represented the constituency for 21 years. He was a good constituency Member and took an interest in education. Indeed, he was a Minister responsible for higher education for some months in 1992.

Carshalton and Wallington is in the London borough of Sutton which has been Liberal Democrat-controlled since 1986. It is in that belt of seats in south-west London that fell to the Liberal Democrats. The London borough of Sutton is unique in at least one respect, in that it has not only a Liberal Democrat council, but two Liberal Democrat Members and a Liberal Democrat peer.

My constituency stretches from Clock House in the south to St. Helier in the north, a large estate built in the 1930s, and from Beddington in the east to Carshalton in the west of the constituency.

The history of the area is well documented in a book by Douglas Cluett. The first sign of life dates from 1000 BC and there are still traces near St. Philomena's school in the constituency. In 1871, excavations on the site of the Beddington sewage farm revealed that the Romans had been there for a very different purpose: there had been a Roman bath house on the site. A number of the parishes were mentioned in the Domesday Book, including Beddintone, or "Beader's farm", Waleton, which was probably a Welsh settlement, and Aultone, or "farm by the spring". Those parishes became Beddington, Wallington and Carshalton.

Newer additions include the St. Helier estate, which comprises 40,000 houses and was built as a garden city in the 1930s. Many of its original features survive to this day. The Roundshaw estate is a much more recent addition and was built on the site of the old Croydon airport. Many of the streets and blocks in the area are named after famous aviators or aircraft manufacturers. Amy Johnson primary school is one example. The Roundshaw estate is currently the subject of a major regeneration project. The council, in partnership with various other organisations, is spending £105 million on the estate, taking away the walkways and the underground garages and making it a place where people will be proud to live.

I return to the subject of tonight's debate by mentioning Bandon Hill primary school, which is attended by many of the children who live on the Roundshaw estate. It was the first constituency visit that I made after my election and many exciting developments are taking place. Seven new classrooms are being built, and for the first time the school will have an assembly hall that is big enough to accommodate all its pupils. That is excellent news.

I do not understand, however, how the abolition of the assisted places scheme will help other schools in the borough that are in similar need of major renovation works. Temporary buildings—a euphemism for huts—have been in place for 30 or 40 years, and there is no possibility of their being replaced in the short or medium term.

The abolition of the assisted places scheme will not do anything about the Greenwich judgment, which affects all the constituencies in south-west London, particularly my own. In some schools, more than 50 per cent. of the pupils in any given year come from outside the borough. Perhaps we are victims of our own success. Since we cannot predict how many out-of-borough pupils will take places from local pupils who need them, we have the problem every year of a mad scramble to try to find enough school places in the borough.

The Liberal Democrats pledged an extra £2 billion each year for education. That is what we think is necessary to provide an education system that is second to none. In contrast, all that the Bill proposes is an extra £100 million. That may sound a lot—there is some dispute about whether the figure is £100 million or £40 million—but is it really enough to provide high-quality education for absolutely everyone? The Liberal Democrats want to provide the best for all our pupils, as I am sure do Government Members. I am afraid that Conservative Members are talking about a select group of people to whom they want to give priority.

The £100 million on offer through the abolition of the assisted places scheme is the only new money being found by the Government for education. Although we will be supporting the Bill, I urge the Government to be more ambitious. We must tackle head-on the legacy of 18 years of neglect. If we do so, we shall command the respect of the British people, who are crying out for change.

9.15 pm

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. In line with all the other maiden speeches that have been made in this debate, the speech by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) was very well thought out and shows that, when one is involved in debate and discussion, one can learn from the opinions and thoughts of others, as I am sure we all will in future.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to be able to address the House as the first Labour Member for Gedling—or Carlton as it was called from 1951. It is also an honour for my family, although the first concern of my children was that I should not be seen on television. Many hon. Members have told me that I should get out of that habit fairly quickly if I want to make any progress. I thank the people of Gedling for their support and assure them that I will represent them to the best of my ability.

My immediate predecessor was Andrew Mitchell, who was extremely well regarded in the constituency. He was respected as a hard-working Member of Parliament, who took up the cases of many constituents and fought hard for local issues. Whatever the reasons for his defeat, they were nothing to do with lack of work in the constituency.

Andrew Mitchell and I have been political opponents for a number of years. He was first elected as the hon. Member for Gedling in 1987, which was also the year that I first stood for the constituency. In all that time, he has always been polite and courteous to me, and never more so than on 1 May when, despite his personal disappointment, he congratulated me and wished me, as well as the Labour Government, well for the future. I am sure that he will return to public life—although I hope that it is not in Gedling in 2002.

The name Gedling often provokes the questions, "Where?" or "Sorry, did you say gelding?" Gedling is not a type of horse: it is an area of rich diversity that adjoins the city of Nottingham. It borders Sherwood in the north, the River Trent to the south-east and the city of Nottingham to the south-west. The main urban centres are Arnold and Carlton. Arnold has much rich history and is mentioned in the Domesday survey. Until the 1800s, it was a quiet forest village, although now it is a predominantly residential area. Carlton includes the conurbation of Carlton, the more industrialised areas of Colwick and Netherfield to the south and, to the east, the rural area of Gedling, from which the constituency takes its name. Gedling retain much of its village atmosphere, with many old shops and cottages.

[Mr. Vernon Coaker]

There are also two beautiful rural villages. Burton Joyce is the larger. It is popular with commuters to Nottingham and has a most beautiful 13th-century church. Stoke Bardolph is in the valley of the Trent, with lovely views across the river to Shelford and Radcliffe.

The constituency is primarily residential, but has an important industrial and commercial base, which has been badly hit in recent years by the closure of Gedling colliery in 1991 and the more recent closure of the Home Ales brewery in Daybrook, following the Scottish Courage merger, which resulted in the loss of hundreds of jobs and the sad demise of another local brewery.

Gedling borough council is well thought of, particularly for its policies on housing, crime prevention, environmental protection and recycling. I am acutely aware of the number of local issues that I shall want to highlight in the House, including the need for additional funding from one of the many special schemes to help continue the efforts to regenerate Netherfield, the future development possibilities of the Home Ales breweries site in Daybrook, the restoration of the Gedling pit site to form a country park, which seems slow in coming to fruition, and the associated campaign for a Gedling bypass.

Today's debate is about education, focusing in particular on reducing class sizes. Just 11 weeks ago, I was a deputy head teacher in Big Wood school, a Nottingham city comprehensive. I applaud the measures that the Government have already taken. There can be nobody who does not regard raising standards of achievement for all children as a major priority for any Government. Phasing out the assisted places scheme and reducing class sizes for all five, six and seven-year-olds will mean a better deal for all our children.

A survey that I conducted of all the primary schools in my constituency showed considerable problems with class sizes. There are many classes of well over 30 for the youngest pupils in Gedling. Indeed, several are approaching 40 and one class has 45. Parents will welcome action on class size because it will help to start the process of meeting the targets set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of 80 per cent. of 11-year-olds reaching national curriculum level 4 in English and 75 per cent. reaching that level in maths. As many hon. Members have said, basic numeracy and literacy are essential for all pupils. Without them, nobody can achieve.

I should like to highlight two other areas of concern that are not helped by ever larger classes. The first is the relatively poor standing of the teaching profession. That is clearly demonstrated by the great difficulty that many schools have in recruiting suitably qualified staff. There are difficulties in head teacher recruitment. *The Times Educational Supplement* pointed out last week that there were 40 per cent. more advertisements for headship vacancies in the primary sector during the first four months of this year than in the same period last year, and nearly 60 per cent. more in the secondary sector. Coupled with the teacher recruitment shortage, that means that real difficulties could lie ahead. Those problems are affecting schools all over the country, including those in my constituency. I look forward to working with the Government to tackle those and other problems.

The second problem is the increasing disaffection among a significant proportion of school children. If we are to raise levels of achievement, all pupils must be able to learn in a calm, reasonable environment and teachers must be able to teach. Class size matters—as does good teaching—because it allows teachers to deal with individual problems.

Statistics from the House of Commons Library show that there were 11,084 permanent exclusions from schools in 1994-95, compared with 2,910 in 1990. We need to deal with that worrying upward trend across the country. The Bill gives us an opportunity to do something for the majority of children in our schools. By abolishing the assisted places scheme, we will provide extra resources to tackle the problem that faces our youngest children.

We have a modernising Government who are determined to raise achievement for all. There is a mood of great optimism about education, but there is also a realistic acceptance that there are no quick fixes and that tough and difficult decisions will have to be made if we are to improve our schools. We have great confidence about the possibilities before us. I look forward to the challenge and I will work hard to do my best to play a small part in achieving the goals of the new Labour Government—a fairer, more just society in which opportunities are available to all, whatever their background. If we are to realise those goals, the success of our education policies will be crucial, and the Bill will be a start along that road.

9.24 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I congratulate the hon. Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) on his maiden speech, which was fluent and interesting. He paid a generous tribute to his predecessor, Andrew Mitchell, who was a great friend of many Conservative Members, and we noted the hon. Gentleman's courtesy. Andrew Mitchell was a fine constituency Member and I worked closely with him on the coal industry.

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) on her interesting contribution to the debate. I had an especial interest in her speech because her late father, Sir Ian Mactaggart Bt, was a close friend of mine. He was a sound Conservative for whom I campaigned with great diligence and enthusiasm in Fulham in 1970 when he failed to take the seat from Michael Stewart, the Labour Foreign Secretary. I am sure that the hon. Lady's father would be pleased to see her in the House, although, as he was a fine supporter of the Common Market safeguards campaign, he will look down on her for some sound views on the European single currency.

When I was a Member of Parliament in the 1980s, I took great pride in the Conservatives' efforts to extend opportunity through the assisted places scheme. We gave the opportunity of a first-class education to many pupils who would not otherwise have enjoyed it. The scheme was a ladder of opportunity that we extended to some 80,000 children, but the Bill will kick that ladder of opportunity away.

The Bill is squalid and it represents old Labour, not new Labour. The Bill is spiteful and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) said, it will not level up, but level down. The attitude is, "Because not everybody can have it, nobody shall have it." I have not heard one Labour Member suggest that the quality of

education received by those with assisted places was anything to complain about. Labour Members know that they will take away from children a quality of education that is second to none, and they should be ashamed of what they are doing tonight. They speak not for the parents, but for the old school of Labour envy. The message must go out to the people that Labour has not changed its spots, and that one of the first measures that it has introduced is this spiteful, squalid little measure. It shows where Labour's true allegiance lies.

The Government have introduced the Bill in the name of providing funds to reduce class sizes. Everybody is in favour of reducing class sizes, but I can tell Labour Members that people do not send their children to independent schools simply because of the class sizes. That is a myth. People send their children to independent schools—many of them make huge sacrifices to do so—for other reasons. They do so because of the ethos and the discipline.

Mr. Stevenson: Come on!

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman does not understand those matters because he is an old-fashioned socialist. I know him from my time in Staffordshire and he has not changed, as we shall find out.

Independent schools provide a first-class education, and children are benefiting from that today. Their parents are grateful for the scheme—my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead mentioned a specific case—and it is a tragedy that it is being withdrawn. The Bill demonstrates the Labour Party's innate hostility to excellence and to independent education. I hope that we shall not see further moves in that direction.

Finally, I am disappointed that the Government did not seek to amend the assisted places scheme in any way. As a former Education Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) will know that in my previous constituency of Cannock and Burntwood is Maple Hayes, an independent school for dyslexic children that provides a fantastic service and is extremely popular with parents. That school has done an immense amount of good work, and from discussions that I have had with my hon. Friend I know that it was her desire, if funds had become available, to extend the assisted places scheme to cover special educational needs.

I accept the fact that I have been fairly hostile to the Bill. None the less, may I, in a spirit of compromise, suggest that the Minister could pick up the assisted places scheme? Instead of portraying himself, as he and his colleagues do, as pursuing a policy out of a sense of dogma and envy, he could say, "We shall keep some element of the scheme, and provide assisted places for special educational needs."

We all know that in the maintained sector there is little or no boarding or specialist provision. A great deal more could be done in that regard. I hope that, even at this late hour, the Labour party might consider the opportunity that assisted places could provide for extending the benefits of special education in the independent sector to a wider range of children.

I hope that the Minister will respond to that point, and perhaps give Conservative Members some hope—and also some justification for the belief that the Bill is not motivated simply by dogma.

9.31 pm

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech tonight. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) and I have sat on the Government Benches for many hours of debate on the Bill over the last couple of weeks, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on his own excellent maiden speech.

It is a privilege to have the opportunity to make my maiden speech. Like my predecessor, Gordon Oakes, who had a long and distinguished career in the House for more than 30 years, I was born and brought up in my constituency. Gordon Oakes became the Member for Halton when the seat was created in 1983, but was first elected to Parliament in 1964 as the Member for Bolton, West. He lost his seat in 1970, but won another at a by-election at Widnes in 1971.

Gordon was an able Member of the House, and served as Parliamentary Secretary at both the Department of the Environment and the Department of Energy. He was promoted to Minister of State, Department of Education and Science in the previous Labour Government, and was made a Privy Councillor in 1979. He was also an excellent constituency Member of Parliament, and helped many thousands of people during his career. I wish him a long and happy retirement.

It is right for me to mention, too, that the constituency produced another excellent Member of Parliament—Jack Ashley, now Lord Ashley, whose work on behalf of the disabled is well known.

Halton is not a town in itself, but an area based on local government boundaries drawn up in 1974. It comprises the proud towns of Widnes and Runcorn and the beautiful village of Hale. Most of the original town of Runcorn is in my constituency, although most of its new town area is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall).

Mine is a constituency of many waterways—the river Mersey, the Manchester ship canal, the Bridgewater canal and the St. Helen's canal.

The early pioneering chemical industry had its roots in my constituency, and that industry is still the largest local employer today. There are few household goods which do not contain components produced by the chemical industry in Halton.

One of the legacies left by the chemical industry was massive land contamination, especially in Widnes. However, through the fantastic efforts of the borough council and the local community, that situation has been transformed by a large land reclamation programme over the past 20 years. Where once were the most polluted tracts of land in the country, we now have a superb shopping centre, a golf course, open spaces and parkland.

With a much improved environment and excellent transport links, Halton is now a popular place to live. It is also the home of one of the most imaginative and interesting museums in the country—the national chemical industry museum, Catalyst.

Our most famous landmark is the Runcorn-Widnes bridge, similar in design to the Sydney harbour bridge and dwarfing the Tyne bridge. It is a stunning sight when lit up at night. Unfortunately, the bridge has now reached capacity, and we face regular congestion and queuing to get over it. I feel sure that this Government will adopt

[Mr. Derek Twigg]

a much more positive approach to working with Halton borough council and the Merseyside and Cheshire local authorities to come up with a solution for a second crossing, which is crucial to the economic and social development of the area.

My constituency has a great sporting tradition, as the home of Runcorn football club and Widnes rugby league club, now known as Widnes Vikings. Widnes rugby league club is the second most successful club in the history of rugby league. Indeed, given the size of the town, it has done even better than Wigan.

I mentioned earlier that the chemical industry is our largest employer. Over the past 20 or 30 years, it has shrunk significantly, and there is a need to continue to bring more diverse industries into the constituency. Our biggest challenge is high unemployment: real unemployment is running at 24 per cent. and youth unemployment is more than 40 per cent. A recent survey of local employers showed a 40 per cent. skills shortage—which explains why I wanted to speak in today's debate.

Education and training are crucial to my constituency. The Prime Minister was right to make education our No. 1 priority, and I know that the new Halton unitary authority, due to take over next April, will make education its top priority so as to help to regenerate the towns of Widnes and Runcorn by producing a skilled and flexible work force and improving the cultural and social lives of its citizens.

We must get things right at the very beginning. Lifelong learning starts in the early years, and I am pleased by the commitment to extending early years provision. I welcome the Bill and the move to end the assisted places scheme and to use the money to cut class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. That is very important to primary schools in Halton, where there are 141 classes of 30 or more. That means 4,464 children, or 40 per cent. of the total. Our children deserve better individual attention from their teachers, and small classes can help to achieve that.

Although this is only one component in the strategy to raise standards in education, it is a crucial one. In Halton, 54.6 per cent. of 11-year-olds fail to reach the required standard in maths, and 50.6 per cent. fail to reach it in English—hence the importance of this measure to my constituency.

I also believe that the breadth of the curriculum that primary teachers have to deliver is onerous. It does not leave enough time to spend on teaching the basics: reading, writing and arithmetic. I welcome today's announcement by the Minister in that regard.

It is clear that the early years are a crucial part of a child's education. An 11-year-old who is not properly equipped for secondary school will quickly fall behind, making the job doubly difficult for teachers in secondary schools. Many secondary school teachers have told me that they despair at the poor numeracy and literacy skills of some of their pupils. Those pupils then struggle throughout the rest of their time at school.

I also welcome the Labour Government's commitment to improved teaching standards. Most teachers do an excellent job and deserve the highest praise. Many have their jobs made much more difficult by the immense problems of social deprivation and poor parenting in some areas; but there are also teachers who are not up to the job, and they should not be anywhere near a classroom. Some schools are clearly failing their children. Although there may be poverty and poor discipline in some homes, that should not be used as an excuse for poor teaching and poor schools. There are plenty of examples of good teaching and good schools in similar circumstances. I therefore welcome the commitment to deal effectively with incompetent teachers, and the publication of the names of failing schools, as clear signs of our determination to raise standards.

As a further element in improving standards, I hope that the Secretary of State will publish much more information about the performance of schools. The current league tables are flawed and do not accurately reflect the true achievements of many schools. Nor do they give parents enough information.

Finally, I thank the people of Halton for electing me. It is a great privilege to sit in this House as their Member of Parliament. They are hard-working and generous people who have waited a long time for a Labour Government.

9.39 pm

Mrs. Gillan: We have had a long and wide-ranging debate on the Bill, and one of the great pleasures has been the number of maiden speeches made on Second and Third Reading. I congratulate unreservedly all those hon. Members who have chosen Third Reading to make their maiden speeches. In particular, I congratulate the hon. Members for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), for Southampton, Test (Mr. Whitehead), for Luton, South (Ms Moran), for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake), for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) and for Halton (Mr. Twigg).

I want to single out two of the maiden speeches made this evening. I extend a personal and warm welcome to the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) because, although she cut this point out of her speech, she went to the same school as I did—so now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have two Cheltenham ladies college girls to deal with. The way in which the hon. Lady acquitted herself suggests that they are a force to be reckoned with.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who made an excellent maiden speech. It is a humbling experience to see how hon. Members make their maiden speeches and remain entirely note-free zones—an art which I cannot claim to have mastered myself.

The number of teachers, or ex-teachers, who have participated in the debate, especially from the Government Benches, leads me to remark that, while they can rightly be proud of being teachers, their presence has probably contributed to an increased pupil-teacher ratio. Perhaps they could give some thought to that.

I hope that many of the good teachers will remain in the profession. Those who have come here will bring their expertise on education. I hope that the Government will realise that not everything that they do in the future will be supported by those hon. Members who used to be teachers, but more of that later.

The Bill, with its seven clauses, is small and looks innocuous, but like a bullet it is small and lethal. It is lethal to families on low incomes. I remind the House of the reasons why the assisted places scheme was introduced. In 1979, the then Secretary of State, Mark Carlisle, said:

"The direct grant grammar schools gave a high-quality academic education to children of ability, irrespective of the means of their parents. We on the Conservative Benches regretted greatly the decision to put and end to that scheme . . . They are, therefore, available only to those who can pay."

Many of the schools had gone independent; therefore, he said:

"The schools exist. That means of opportunity exists. That means of opportunity should be restored to able children whose parents are unable to meet the cost."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 1979; Vol. 973, c. 41.]

The reason why the scheme was introduced is apparent to all Conservative Members but ignored by Labour Members. By introducing the Bill so rapidly, the Government have shown that they still practise the politics of envy of the worst possible sort. The Labour party remains true to the old principle: if my neighbour has a Rolls-Royce, do I work hard and try to buy one myself? Do I feel happy that he has worked hard enough to buy the car? No—I work to ensure that that Rolls-Royce is removed from him.

That is what the Bill does: it takes a type of education which suits certain children away from those of limited means. We have learnt that the Government will not even listen to reasoned argument. They believe that they are absolutely right. *[Interruption.]* I can see that Ministers believe that they are absolutely right. Laurens van der Post once wrote that there is no more dangerous animal than a man who believes that he is absolutely right.

The Government are dangerous men and women, because they will not listen to anything which could possibly make better that which they have laid before the House. In Committee, they brushed aside all the constructive arguments put forward by Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members to try to improve the legislation.

Behind the legislation lies a false promise. It is false because it aims to reduce class sizes in primary schools, yet the Institute of Public Finance report shows that eliminating all classes exceeding 30 for five, six and seven-year-olds would cost about £65 million annually, with an estimated additional cost of £100 million and that that would happen only if action was taken simultaneously to restrict admissions to primary schools.

The Minister for School Standards estimated that, by the turn of the century—not next year or the year after, but the year 2000—he might have saved £100 million. He is not sure; he cannot give us the figures. He cannot give us the figures for reducing class sizes. In fact, I wonder whether he can answer any of our questions. In the debate, the Minister exhibited a lack of understanding of what we were saying. His completely inadequate responses make us ask us a lot of questions about him and the brief that he holds. He did not answer any Opposition questions in any of his speeches on any of the amendments. In particular, he did not explain how the money that he hopes to save from the assisted places scheme will be ring-fenced to ensure that it reaches the primary classes whose sizes he hopes to reduce.

The Minister believes that his is the party of unity and that all Labour Members agree with what the Government are doing. Not according to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett), however. Writing in the *Manchester Metro News* as recently as 13 May—the article was written by him, not a journalist, and says that small classes may not get top marks—he says:

"Labour's election promise to reduce infant school classes to 30 seems an obvious first step towards better education all round.

But I am afraid it is not going to be plain sailing. Here's a hypothetical example. Seventy-one children apply to a school; it accepts 66 children which it plans to put into two classes of 33; five have had to be turned down. The result—five sets of upset and indignant parents.

If the school is forced to limit class size to 30, a further six children will have to be turned away. A nearby less popular school could take the original five rejected children and the additional six. But now there are 11 sets of angry parents.

Alternatively, the intake could be reorganised into three classes. That would allow the five children who had been refused a place to come to the school after all, making two classes of 24 and one of 23. But there is no third classroom, so where could they go?

Now there are 23 angry parents complaining about their children having to have lessons in the school hall or a portacabin in the playground.

Of course, small classes are ideal—but, as this example shows, the way ahead is going to be littered with pitfalls. It isn't necessarily going to be as popular with parents as you might think."

I hope that Ministers will talk to the hon. Gentleman and explain how they are going to solve those problems.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Gillan: No, I have very little time—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."]. I am sorry, I did not realise that it was the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) who wanted to intervene. I will give way by all means.

Mr. Bennett: If the hon. Lady was so keen to quote me, she could have given me notice that I should be in the Chamber—fortunately, I was here. If she is so keen on quoting the article, will she explain my experience as a young teacher, facing large classes and the problems that that posed? It would have been fairer to quote the whole article, since she went so far.

Mrs. Gillan: I apologise. I did not realise that it was the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish intervening. I think that the article is good and I congratulate the hon. Member on it. Of course, he would know, because he was a teacher.

The Government have put education at the top of their list of priorities, but have we seen anything constructive in the Bill? No—it is busy taking something off children, rather than adding something to education. We have learnt a lot from the Bill. We have learnt that the Government can break pledges just weeks after they are elected: the Walton pledge has been broken. We have learnt that the Government will ram-raid policy through. We have learnt that they will make pledges when they do not know where the money is to come from. We have learnt that they intend to answer no questions from the Opposition.

This legislation attacks the few, not the many, and it attacks the weakest. It has been introduced to fulfil a bankrupt pledge. The Government are busy stifling the small voices of the minority because it is easy to stifle the weakest in our society. The Government are levelling down, not levelling up. I give them this warning. We have said that, if the Government are going to improve the education sector, we will support them, but I warn the Minister for School Standards now that the Opposition

[Mrs. Gillan]

will resist any attempts such as this to destroy the range of choice and diversity that we have created in the education sector—the state education sector.

This is an appalling Bill, and the Labour Government should be ashamed of bringing it in.

9.51 pm

Mr. Byers: Tonight, we have had an informative and useful debate, with a number of excellent maiden speeches, in particular from my hon. Friends the Members for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), for Southampton, Test (Mr. Whitehead), for Luton, South (Ms Moran), for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), for Gedling (Mr. Coaker) and for Halton (Mr. Twigg), who all spoke with great compassion because they know that our key pledge to reduce class sizes for every five, six and seven-year-old was one of the main reasons why Labour had such an overwhelming success on 1 May. That was the pledge on which we stood in the election and that is the pledge that we are beginning to honour this evening.

We also heard maiden speeches from the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and—from the Liberal Democrat Benches—the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake), both of whom spoke about the need to improve the education service.

In the time available, I want to deal with the issues raised in the debate, particularly those raised by Opposition Members. There has been concern about the cut-off in clause 2 at age 11 for young people receiving an assisted place. I assure the House that the discretion to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment referred on Second Reading will be honoured. That means that the discretion will be flexible and it will be exercised in a way that is generous and sympathetic towards the needs of the pupils concerned.

Particular concern has been expressed about the position of 10-year-olds. Some have received accelerated places—they have been given a secondary education at the age of 10. As the law stands, only those young people aged ten and a half or older are deemed to be in secondary education and therefore receiving an assisted place through to the age of 18 in that school. As a demonstration of our commitment, in a generous way, to exercise the discretion contained in the Bill, it is our intention to extend that provision to all 10-year-olds so that they will receive an assisted place at the same school until the age of 18.

In opening the Third Reading debate, the shadow Secretary of State spoke about the mechanism that we would need to fund our commitment to reduce class sizes. The funding made available to local authorities will be ring-fenced and will be used only for the express purpose of reducing class size. I understand that some local education authorities will not respond positively to that and will argue that they need flexibility to meet local needs. However, we believe that there is one pressing need in the education service at present: to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds. It is a pledge that we intend to honour, which is why the funding will be ring-fenced.

Mrs. Gillan: I welcome the Minister's announcement on 10-year-olds. I hope that it was, in part, a response to some of the Opposition's reasoned arguments.

On class sizes, has the Minister had a chance to look at the written answer that I received earlier today on the number of children—14,000—who belong to travellers' families and who his Department estimates are not in education? Has he estimated the cost of adding 14,000 more children to the education system? Will he make efforts to get those children back into the education system? How will that affect class sizes?

Mr. Byers: That comment comes ill from someone who was a Minister in a Government who cut section 210 funds, which expressly made money available to travellers for their education.

We share the shadow Secretary of State's concern about the impact on the school population of those pupils who would have received assisted places and may well have to go into the maintained sector. We shall start phasing out the assisted places scheme in September 1998; 10,000 young people would have entered the scheme at that time. If all those young people return to the maintained sector, the number will represent one eighth of 1 per cent. of the total school population of 8 million young people—that is the scale of the problem that the shadow Secretary of State identified. When in government, she presided over a regime that saw more than 450,000 additional pupils in the school sector at the same time as budget cuts meant that there were 6,000 fewer teachers.

Mr. Hayes: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Byers: No, I shall not.

Those were rich comments from a shadow Secretary of State who, when in office, failed to meet the needs of the majority of our young people.

The Government agree with the comments of a former Conservative Member of Parliament for Buckingham, George Walden, who said that there were just two things wrong with the assisted places scheme: the principle and the practice. He was absolutely right and we agree with his analysis. That is why tonight we begin the process of dismantling the assisted places scheme, the costs of which cannot be justified—£160 million this year, rising to £200 million by the turn of the century. The phasing out of the scheme will free resources to meet our class size pledge. That is in stark contrast to the Conservative party, which presided over increase after increase in class sizes.

The Bill marks the end of the assisted places scheme which benefited the few at the expense of so many. It is the beginning of the end of overcrowded infant classes and represents another milestone in our crusade to raise standards. Some 440,000 young people in overcrowded classes are the innocent victims of the previous Government's neglect of the state system of education. That must come to an end.

Forty days ago, the British people elected a new Labour Government. In just 40 days, the House with its Labour majority will honour one of our key election pledges. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 399, Noes 147.

Division No. 26] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Thomas
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ieuan Wyn *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Opik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian

Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steven
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Clive Betts and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple-Morris, Peter
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin and
Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

A494 (Improvements)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

10.16 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I, first, use this opportunity to congratulate the Minister sincerely on his appointment? I do so in the confidence that he will wish to do his utmost to carry out his duties to the best of his considerable ability. I believe that, by unblocking the conundrum that I shall shortly unfold to the House, he will have a golden opportunity to do that. I hope that he will grasp that opportunity and really make a name for himself.

This morning, I had an opportunity to consult "The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary." The word "temporary" is defined as

"Lasting or meant to last for a limited time only; not permanent; made or arranged to supply a passing need."

The dictionary continues:

"Things belonging to this life, temporal goods."

That is probably a better definition in the context of the appalling story of the A494.

I am pleased to have an opportunity to discuss this matter. It is not trivial; it means a lot to many thousands of people in Wales and certainly a large proportion of my constituency. The traffic lights concerned, on the A494 at Drws y Nant—yes, *Hansard*, I will send up a copy of my speech—are temporary traffic lights, according to the Welsh Office. In fact, they have been in place for more than 18 years and may yet become the subject of a comic opera. That may sound a little far-fetched; indeed, if it were not such a serious matter, it would be quite funny. In reality, it is anything but funny for thousands of people day in, day out.

It might help the Minister if I am permitted to give a brief chronology of the matter. The lights were installed in 1979, on boxing day, because the road was considered unsafe and prone to subsidence, posing a possible danger to road users. The road was therefore closed 20 years ago for "urgent" repairs.

To be absolutely fair, however, the stretch of road is not the easiest to repair because, on one side, there is a steep drop and, on the other, there is steep and rocky terrain. None the less, over the past few years far more difficult engineering feats have been accomplished in north and mid-Wales, and there is no question but that, given the necessary will, the situation could readily be remedied.

From 1979 to 1986, many individuals, councils and societies regularly wrote to the Welsh Office pointing out the inherent dangers in allowing the road to be used as it was being used, albeit temporary traffic lights and a one-way system had been installed. Over the years, there have been numerous very serious accidents at the spot, which is so narrow that a collision will almost inevitably result if a bus or lorry meets another vehicle on a bend. Many very experienced drivers have been involved in very serious collisions on that road.

I travelled the road from my home to my office almost every day from 1979 until I was elected as Member of Parliament, and I can vouch for the inherent danger of the current system. Moreover, on countless occasions I have had to wait in traffic jams, some lasting as long as one hour, as two vehicles attempted to manoeuvre past one another without colliding with each other, the rock face or the wall. If one of the vehicles is in a hurry, nothing short of a calamity will occur.

When I was in legal practice, I often arrived late for court appearances because of the state of the road. I am making, however, not a personal plea but a plea on behalf of many thousands of people in my constituency. The current situation is dangerous because, as people are released from the traffic jam, their normal tendency is to exceed the speed limit to make up time, thereby causing a knock-on effect and danger to all road users.

My predecessor in the House, Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas, who is now in the other place, assiduously pursued the problem in attempting to persuade the Welsh Office to attach due priority to a solution. The former Gwynedd county council regularly made representations to the Welsh Office, as did—to give but a few examples—Bala town council, Brithdir and Llanfrchrath community council, Dolgellau town council, Llanuwchllwn community council, Meirionnydd district council, the Farmers Union of Wales and the National Farmers Union of England and Wales. The correspondence file is huge, and it confirms the priority that at least the people of Meirionnydd attach to the matter even if, hitherto, the Welsh Office has not.

In October 1987, the then Minister of State at the Welsh Office responded to an inquiry from my predecessor, stating that a solution would be a matter of prioritising schemes within the Welsh Office budget. He also stated that it would be unrealistic to expect improvements until sometime in "the early 1990s".

In January 1988, in a letter to Mr. John Dyer James, the county secretary of the Farmers Union of Wales, the director of highways wrote:

"The design work highlighted problems and an assessment of alternative routes has been carried out. The results of that exercise are being studied and we would hope to undertake some improvement as soon as we can, although it would be unwise to anticipate that work could commence before the early 1990s."

That is the line that was adopted. Correspondence continued with individuals, councillors, my predecessor and many other people.

In January 1990, the director of highways at the Welsh Office responded to a letter from a local county councillor, Miss Gwenfon Hughes, who has assiduously pursued the matter. The reply to her letter took from 12 October to 30 January, which, one might think, was not a very good start. The letter stated:

"We are, however, hoping to complete our evaluation of the option at Drws-y-Nant, for example whether there should be on-line improvement or a new alignment in the near future, and then to get on with the detailed design work."

The letter goes on to state that the officer concerned is

"afraid the scheme is unlikely to start before the early 1990s and even if the statutory procedures can be satisfactorily completed and funds are available work could not start before late 1992 at the earliest."

On 7 February that year, another Welsh Office employee wrote, in response to the very same letter from the very same county councillor, that it would not be sooner than the mid-1990s before the work could commence. In the space of seven days, from 30 January to 7 February 1990, the commencement time slipped three

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

years. People think that "Yes Minister" was far-fetched. Was that response reasonable? It was not, in my view, a reasonable way in which to deal with an inquiry.

In March 1990, interim measures to improve the situation were ruled out on the ground of cost. In the meantime, the Welsh Office attempted to justify its non-activity by saying that traffic numbers were low. Nothing could be further from the truth. The A494 is one of the arterial roads carrying holidaymakers from Manchester, Liverpool and the midlands to various seaside resorts in the constituency, such as Barmouth and Tywyn. It is a very busy road all year round. It serves two cattle marts, one each end of the route, and those cattle marts are convened at least once a week and sometimes twice.

In 1991, the line adopted by the Welsh Office was that

"allowing for the completion of statutory procedures, the possibility of a public inquiry and the time that will be required to complete the detailed design of the scheme, a start of works is unlikely for several years."

It was implied that the statutory procedures and the detailed design would take some time. The Welsh Office had already had 16 years to carry that work out and one wonders how much longer it really required.

In May 1991, the then Secretary of State for Wales, David Hunt, in a markedly helpful response to a Conservative opponent of mine said:

"On present estimates the work will cost some £1.6 million".

I wonder how much the work would have cost 17 years ago. The letter continued:

"and statutory procedures will be started in 1993 to enable the work itself to begin in March 1994."

The letter was heralded by my Conservative opponent as a real breakthrough, although he did not make a breakthrough at the election.

Regular correspondence continued and the start date slipped again from 1994 to the mid-1990s. According to parliamentary answers, work would commence in 1994, subject to the satisfactory completion of our old friend the statutory procedures. As a lawyer, I can tell the House that those procedures take very little time if one applies a little common sense and gets on with the job in hand. I have been able to do the job in a matter of months or weeks, so I cannot see why the Welsh Office could not do it.

Another excuse was introduced, this time the availability of finance. A parliamentary answer was given on 1 February 1993 bringing in the new excuse. In an answer in January 1994, it was said that draft orders for the scheme were due to be published in the spring and that commencement of the work was dependent on satisfactory completion of the statutory procedures. Again, the answer referred to finance. That was cold comfort for those having to use this dangerous route every day.

In March 1994, for example, a lorry driver was badly injured. His legs were trapped and he was stuck in his cab for many hours. That was one of several serious accidents over the years. The man was a local lorry driver and he knew the risks, but the on-coming lorry driver did not, hence the collision. I sent details to the Welsh Office and received, in April 1994, a response from the then Minister of State, who said:

"Subject to statutory procedures and draft orders, we hope to start the works in 1995-6."

That was a further two years' slippage.

In January 1996, the new Minister of State said that the work was programmed to start in 1997, subject to our old friend the statutory procedures and, again, the availability of finance. Since then, the Drws y Nant pressure group has been set up. It has been most effective due to the good offices of Mr. Trebor Roberts JP, the chair, and Mrs. Bailey, the honorary secretary.

I understand that the scheme is now in the reserve programme for the financial year 1997-98. Therefore, it will not be started until 1998 at the earliest. The temporary traffic lights are already in the "The Guinness Book of Records". I am always pleased when my constituency is mentioned, but I am not so happy about that reference.

The last letter that I received from the former Minister of State at the Welsh Office, Mr. Gwilym Jones, stated:

"The improvement is included in the medium schemes programme and albeit it awaits the availability of funds it continues to remain a high priority. Statutory procedures are complete, orders have been made and tender documents have been prepared and are ready for issue.

In the house on 12 December 1996, the Secretary of State announced the Welsh Office budget of £6.9 billion and explained his spending plans".

I suppose there is some hope, but I found that letter quite ominous and I wonder whether I read it correctly. If so, after all the years of patience and dozens of serious accidents, is the Welsh Office seriously suggesting in the second paragraph of that letter that

"maintenance of the existing network"

will preclude the commencement of work on the scheme? That is absolutely unacceptable after such a long delay.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the whole story is a farce from beginning to end. It is appalling, not least because of the facts that I have set out. Incidentally, the annual cost of hiring the lights is more than £1,800.

The danger is increasing due to heavier traffic and the deterioration of the road. This summer, Bala—which is my home area and the cradle of Welsh culture—will host the national eisteddfod, which I am sure the Minister will attend. Between 120,000 and 150,000 people visit that festival, and no doubt a number of them will have to tackle this obstacle.

The eisteddfod is held in August, when holiday traffic is at its heaviest. In the name of reason I call on the Minister to give me an unqualified assurance that the work will be carried out because it is simply a matter of time before there is a fatal accident. There have already been many serious accidents in which people have been maimed for life. It will be no comfort to me to say, "I told you so" if and when someone is killed.

Furthermore, the obstacle is undoubtedly hampering the area in terms of inward investment and must surely be offputting to tourists. Wholesalers to retail premises in Dolgellau and the south of the constituency are generally not prepared to send large lorries to Dolgellau and Bala and frequently opt for two smaller ones, thereby increasing the cost of delivery. The knock-on effect is clear: retailers have to pay more for the goods with obvious results.

It is high time that real action is taken. Although the present Government have been in office for only a few weeks, they tell us that it is now time to act. Let us have

action without any further prevarication or delay. I know the Minister to be an honourable man, so I trust that he will respond accordingly, because fairness and common sense demand it.

I realise that, for most of the time the lights have been in place, we have had a Conservative Administration. I now invite the Minister to bring this iniquitous and dangerous folly to an end and show that the Labour Government are prepared to take action where it is necessary and are not simply paying lip service to slogans such as "action, not words."

I shall listen carefully to the Minister's reply. I hope that he will be able to give me some assurances which, after some 18 years, are not being hurried out of him. I am sure that he has considered his response and will realise that the problem is a danger to the public. I ask him to give it due priority.

10.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Peter Hain): I should like to express my gratitude for the congratulations of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on my appointment. I congratulate him on securing this debate. He is a widely respected hon. Member, especially for the diligent way in which he represents his constituency. I am aware that he has shown a keen interest in the improvement of the A494 trunk road, particularly the part in his beautiful constituency.

At the outset, I should say that the new Government propose a radically different transport policy in Wales—not that that will be difficult. The Tory Government had no coherent transport policy at all. Thatcherism just left it all to market forces and the result has been shambolic. Our roads are becoming mobile car parks, our railways have been chopped and privatised, and deregulation has brought savage cuts in bus services, resulting in many outlying areas being virtually cut off. Those on low incomes or pensions are consequently trapped and forced to buy from expensive local shops as the age of car driver shopping overshadows us all.

All that is undermining the quality of life and the environment. We will ensure that a new transport policy has a strong green dimension.

As part of our strategic review of roads in Wales, I have made it clear that the completion of two east-west super-highways will be priorities. The completion of the dualling of the A55 across Angelsey will provide a rapid road link from Chester to Holyhead, and the upgrading of the A40 in Pembrokeshire will link the Severn crossings to Fishguard. Both will be major arterial routes for inward investment and increased trade.

The A494, which is known as the Dolgellau-to-south-of-Birkenhead trunk road, carries traffic between mid-Wales and the north-west of England, and to the motorway network beyond. I agree with the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy that it is an arterial road and should be given significance, as he has argued.

In the 1994 review of roads in Wales, the section of the A494 between the Wales and England boundary and its junction with the A55 at Ewloe was designated as a major strategic route, with average daily traffic flows in excess of 54,000 vehicles. In the same document, the section between Ewloe and Dolgellau, with much reduced traffic flows of 16,000—to fewer than 2,000 vehicles a day in some places—was designated as a route where no major strategic improvements to increase overall route capacity for long-distance traffic were considered necessary. That designation recognised its environmental setting. Any improvements on the section that were to be taken forward would be selected and targeted at specific problems such as the one described by the hon. Member.

A number of improvements have been carried out on the A494 over the last 10 years or so. In the constituency of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy, the Pont Rhyd Sarn scheme, which is located between Dolgellau and Llanuwchlyn, involved the construction of a new bridge to replace a substandard one—which had been the site of a number of accidents—and was opened to traffic in the early 1990s.

The schemes already undertaken have been part of the Welsh Office's major and medium scheme programmes. In addition, many minor improvements have been undertaken over the years. There are several proposed improvement schemes in the Department's programme, which is split into major schemes, medium schemes and minor improvements. In the major scheme programme, which includes all schemes costing more than £3 million, two categories apply to the A494 trunk road. The following two schemes are in preparation: the A494 Deeside park to Ewloe improvement and the proposed Ewloe interchange improvement.

In the longer term, there are two further A494 schemes: first, the Mold to Ewloe improvement, which will involve the construction of a dual carriageway between the northern end of the Mold bypass and the proposed Ewloe interchange improvement; and, secondly, the proposed Llanbedr bypass improvement scheme, which is the final major scheme for the A494 currently in the Department's programme.

The Department's current medium scheme programme includes two A494 schemes in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. The first is the proposed Merllwyn Gwyn to Glan yr Afon scheme, which involves the on-line improvement of the existing substandard trunk road. The area is particularly sensitive and my Department is carrying out an extensive environmental assessment.

The second is the Drws y Nant scheme, which is the hon. Gentleman's main concern this evening. I pay tribute to him for the way in which he has pressed for the scheme to go ahead since he came to the House.

The need for the scheme arose when part of the wall and rock support retaining the road became unstable. Traffic had to be kept away from the wall and the river, and one-way working was put in place while consideration was given to alternative remedial measures. After a review of the options available, it was concluded that the best long-term solution would be to construct a new section of road away from the line of the existing route. The necessary planning and investigation were carried out.

A shorter improvement scheme was considered, but discarded because, with the significant cost of around £1 million, it would still leave substandard approaches with poor visibility at Drws y Nant station and would be visually intrusive because of the extensive rock cuttings and long retaining walls needed.

[Mr. Peter Hain]

It was therefore concluded that, in view of the low traffic levels on that part of the A494—3,000 to 3,500 vehicles per day, although the volume is much greater during the holiday months—it would be appropriate to retain the one-way working until the replacement scheme was developed.

I readily concede that the problem has lasted for an intolerably long time. After 17 years, it must rank as the longest lasting set of temporary traffic light in the world. I have not been able to find it in "The Guinness Book of Records", but there was a debate in the pages of the "Reader's Digest" on whether it was the longest. We agree about the need to tackle the problem. As the hon. Gentleman said, the scheme has reached an advanced stage of preparation, with the draft orders having been first published in May 1994.

The proposed Drws y Nant scheme involves the construction of a new 1.3 km length of single carriageway road, with a 7.3m wide carriageway and verges of variable widths. Construction would not have a major effect on the surrounding landscape, as most of the land required is part of the existing road or the dismantled railway. Most of the scheme will be screened from view by the local landform and surrounding woodlands and by the proposed screen planting. There is no objection to the scheme on environmental grounds, and there is strong local support for the improvement, which would take about 18 months to construct.

The design and contract documents for the scheme have been completed on behalf of the Department by Gwynedd council, acting as our agents. This scheme start is dependent on the availability of the necessary finance. Had the finance been available, tenders could have already been invited, but the reduction in central Government funding by the previous Tory Administration prevented such action.

Our review will assess whether schemes such as Drws y Nant can be supported. We will build it if we can. It has the highest priority in the medium schemes road programme. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as a result of this debate, I shall give even more serious consideration to that priority. Work would have started on it this year had it not been for the massive cut in the roads budget, which was nearly halved from £187 million to £115 million over the past two years. The Conservative Government failed the hon. Gentleman's constituency, just as it failed the rest of Wales.

I promise to do my best to get the scheme in the roads programme as soon as possible. It is ready and waiting to go. However, we have been left a dreadful legacy of budget cuts by the Conservatives, and it will be difficult.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman takes some encouragement from my commitments this evening. The future is much brighter, not just for this problem, but for the many other problems involving roads and public transport in Wales. The new Welsh Assembly will help us to implement a coherent transport policy for Wales because it will reflect all parts of the country and ensure that the interests of rural areas—especially those such as the hon. Gentleman's constituency—in mid and north Wales, are protected.

We are aware of the priority that is attached by the hon. Gentleman and local people to the scheme. By all objective criteria, it should be given the go-ahead as soon as we can find the necessary finance. We need to have a general review of transport policy and I hope that the hon. Gentleman, his colleagues, his constituents and other Welsh Members will participate. Transport in Wales needs serious attention. We need to strengthen public transport, develop the strategic routes that I mentioned, and deal with the major routes that pass through the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Part of the answer to the problems will be securing a yes vote in the referendum for a Welsh Assembly, so that we can have policies that are designed for the needs of Wales instead of policies from a distance by the previous Administration who did not understand Wales and, in 18 years, did not deal with its problems.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will participate in the debate on transport policy and I hope that we will be able to resolve the long-standing problem that is so frustrating to his constituents and which he so eloquently described this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 11 June 1997

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Bank of England

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth.]*

9.34 am

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): The announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer about the independence of the Bank of England on interest rates had such a rapturous welcome that it is with some diffidence that I rise to attempt to put a reasoned case against that independence.

The universal acclaim from pundits, commentators and the rest of the chattering classes with which independence for the Bank was greeted reminded me of nothing so much as the universal acclaim that greeted our entry into the exchange rate mechanism some years ago—and we all know what happened to that.

I must begin by saying that, of course, everybody on both sides of in the House is in favour of the lowest possible inflation. There can be no dispute about that. Yet I shall argue against independence, for the following reasons.

First, we cannot decouple economic management from politics. Secondly, the academic arguments for an independent central bank are built on sand, intellectually. Thirdly, the idea is fundamentally undemocratic. Finally, it would mean taking risks with growth and jobs. I represent one of the poorest constituencies in the country, with one of the highest levels of unemployment, so the House will understand that, ultimately, my concern is about growth and jobs.

There can be no doubt that independent central banks are the fashionable thing, not only with British commentators and pundits but internationally. Since the late 1980s, more than 25 countries, from France to Kazakhstan and from New Zealand to Pakistan, have opted for independent central banks, so there is no doubt that the Chancellor is in the vanguard of fashion.

However, with some reluctance, I must tell the House that there is a gaping chasm between what economic theory suggests central bank independence might do and what the empirical evidence shows it can do. Despite the universal assumption among journalists and some of my hon. Friends that an independent central bank necessarily leads to low inflation, the academic research suggests that, although there may be a statistical relationship between central bank independence and low inflation, no causal relationship can be established.

That point is so important that the House will forgive me if I linger for a few minutes on the academic arguments. In 1993, the Treasury Select Committee conducted a major inquiry into the idea of independence for the Bank of England. Our report records that our then specialist adviser, Andrew Wood, reviewing the academic literature, concluded:

"Some general conclusions can be drawn from this review of the literature:—there is a statistical relationship showing that on average countries with independent central banks achieve lower inflation than countries with dependent central banks. There is no conclusive statistical evidence of a causal relationship between the status of the central bank and the inflation performance".

Yet—

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): My hon. Friend has mentioned the Select Committee report. Would it not be fair to point out that the Committee came out in favour of the model proposed by the Chancellor? There was a Conservative majority on the Committee, but all Labour members—with the exception of my hon. Friend—also voted in favour.

Ms Abbott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—with whom I have served with pleasure on the Select Committee for years—for reminding the House that my opposition to bank independence is not short term, but a long-standing position.

Let us look briefly at some of the academic evidence, at the risk of wearying some hon. Members. A major study—which is always quoted by the proponents of independence—was carried out in 1996 by Sylvester Eijffinger and Jacob de Haan, who looked at 20 different studies of bank independence. Out of 20, 18 showed a link between independence and low inflation. There is no doubt that some of my hon. Friends will call this in aid, as always.

Furthermore, another major study in 1991 by Grilli, Macciandaro and Tabellini showed that the three most independent central banks had the lowest inflation. But that is not the sum total of academic work, although one might believe it is from listening to some of the Eddie George groupies in the House.

There is other and more recent academic work on the subject. I draw the House's attention to the studies of Adam Posen, an economist from the New York Federal Reserve, who said that central bank independence was a consequence of pressure from the financial sector. He said:

"Central Bank independence arises from the desires of an interest group—

the financial sector—

"that is more committed to price stability than the average voter."

Michael Jenkins of Hull university said in his research on the subject that, if one factors out other structural factors tending to low inflation—for instance, the corporatist wage bargaining of West Germany—there is no statistically significant relationship between higher central bank independence and low inflation. Gerard Lyons, chief economist of the Japanese bank DKB, has said that the evidence that bank independence guarantees low inflation is slim. In 1993, Blake and Westway said that a central bank pursuing its own goals with no regard for the social welfare function is frequently harmful.

[Ms Abbott]

The first point I am anxious to make is that, just because central bank independence is associated with low inflation—I do not deny that—does not mean that it causes low inflation. That is the weakness of the argument used by my hon. Friends who are in favour of independence. I maintain something different—that, contrary to popular belief, an independent central bank does not create a culture of low inflation, but is a reflection of a culture of low inflation. The distinction may seem pedantic or trifling to some of my hon. Friends, but it is the key distinction.

When people come to argue for an independent central bank, they always pray in aid the Bundesbank and Germany's economic record, and there is no doubt that the Bundesbank is the Arnold Schwarzenegger of monetarism. The Bundesbank has practised a form of macro-monetarism for longer than any of us here can remember. The classic statement of the Bundesbank's position was given by Karl Blessing, its president, in 1966, when he said:

"There can be no hard currency without hard measures."

Let us linger on the German case, which proponents of independence always cite. The belief that the fact that Germany has an independent central bank and also has low inflation is an argument for independent central banks elsewhere is a simple case of reverse causality. I put to the House the following proposition—the reasons for Germany having low inflation are much more fundamental, and partly rooted in its history.

I remind the House that, twice in a generation, Germany experienced hyper-inflation—in 1923 and again after the war. In 1922, inflation in Germany was running at 1,300 per cent. No other G7 country has had that experience this century. The mark ended up in 1923 at one trillionth of its 1913 level. It is at the height of this hyper-inflation that we see historically the Nazis' rise to power.

Immediately after the war—and in the ruins of a defeated Germany—the country once again experienced hyper-inflation. Otmar Issing, chief economist of the Bundesbank, has said:

"It is no coincidence that it is the Germans with their experience of two hyperinflations in the 20th century who have opted for an independent central bank which is committed to price stability."

There are other structural reasons why Germany has low inflation, one of which is the underlying strength of the German economy this century. Germany has had a strong manufacturing sector, a high savings ratio and strong export performance. That is the real economy of Germany, not some short-term monetary fix leading to a low-inflation environment. I would argue that the academic evidence for an independent central bank is simply not soundly based, and I urge my hon. Friends to go back and review the academic evidence.

One of the problems is that central banks have a history of being deflationary. I shall quote from Labour's 1945 manifesto. I do not want to embarrass colleagues who believe that the party has no history, but the 1945 manifesto reflected this country's experiences of the 1930s. In the 1930s, we had an independent central bank, and its name was Montagu Norman. I sometimes think that my colleagues who favour an independent central bank should get T-shirts saying, "Come back, Montagu Norman—all is forgiven."

In the 1945 manifesto, Labour said about the 1930s:

"Great economic blizzards swept the world in these years. The great inter-war slumps were not acts of God or of blind forces. They were the sure and certain result of the concentration of too much economic power in the hands of too few men. These men had only learned how to act in the interest of their own bureaucratically-run private monopolies which may be likened to totalitarian oligarchies within our democratic state. They had and they felt no responsibility to the nation."

Some of my hon. Friends may say, "That was 1945. We are new Labour. What possible relevance does this have to us today?" I would argue that the issue of political accountability and responsibility to the nation is as relevant to the Labour party now as it was in 1945.

In looking at the tendency of central bankers to be deflationary and to overestimate the dangers of inflation, we do not have to look in a crystal ball. I was in the City, talking to some economists with a Japanese bank. They reminded me of the joke that the governor of the Japanese central bank between 1989 and 1995, Mr. Mieno, was voted central bank governor of the year by the Americans for ruining the Japanese economy. He jacked up interest rates relentlessly, and did not reverse the policy quickly enough in a recession. Ultimately, the Japanese Ministry of Finance had to step in in 1992. I hope that it does not come to that in this country.

I do not need to talk about 1945 or about the Japanese in making my case. Sadly, because I am a tremendous admirer of Eddie George—a great and distinguished public servant—I need only talk about the recent history of monetary policy in this country.

In May 1995, the Governor of the Bank of England, Eddie George, recommended that interest rates be raised by 0.5 per cent. to meet the inflation target. This view was based in part on the Bank's notorious inflation forecasts, which Mervyn King—who is in charge of these matters—admitted to the Committee had a poor track record, producing overly pessimistic forecasts of inflation. The then Chancellor refused to accept the Governor's advice because, in his judgment, the economy was slowing sufficiently for the inflation target to be met.

Two years later, we know that the former Chancellor's judgment was correct. I am well aware that he needs no endorsement from me. Whatever we think of the contestants for the Conservative party leadership, he consistently called the economy right more times than Eddie George.

I do not want Eddie George to be hurt by these remarks. There is nothing wrong with central bankers having a deflationary bias—that is what they are for; it is the culture in which they are bred—but history teaches us that they should be under democratic control.

The downside of a central bank is that it is hard to achieve co-ordination of policy, and there are risks to jobs and to growth and the danger of an overvalued pound. It is also almost irreversible. Of the 20 frequently cited studies on central bank independence, only one associates it with growth. Guy Debelle and Stanley Fischer said:

"Since 1962, countries with independent central banks have suffered deeper recessions on average than those without."

Mark Hutchison and Carl Walsh found the same in a study of New Zealand. Robert Chote, economics editor of the *Financial Times*, writing in a personal capacity, said:

"People may lose their jobs unnecessarily because Mr. Brown is abdicating responsibility for achieving his inflation to the Bank."

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): I am sure that my hon. Friend will be interested in the response from

industry since the Chancellor declared the independence of the Bank of England. In my part of the world, the largest industrial region in the north-west, the bosses are backing Labour: in the latest poll of industrialists, 88 per cent. responded in support of the Chancellor. Business confidence has been restored for the first time in many years. That is an independent response to an independent bank system.

I am sure that my hon. Friend would not doubt that that response is to be acclaimed. Our fiscal and industrial policy is helping our domestic economy to take off, and I am sure that she would wish it every success.

Ms Abbott: Of course industry and business are backing Labour—even some Tories are backing Labour—but did my hon. Friend notice the squeals from industry when Eddie George slapped in his first interest rate rise a few days ago? It is one thing to back a policy in principle, but another to back it when the consequences for the pound and for exports become clear.

One of the arguments urged by the proponents of independence is that monetary policy is in some sense different from fiscal policy and public spending. They say that politicians have always played politics with interest rates, so monetary policy should be taken out of their hands. In what way is monetary policy different from and more important than fiscal policy and public spending? In fact, politicians have been more apt to play politics with taxation and public spending decisions than with monetary policy.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Abbott: I think that I had better get on, as some of my hon. Friends want to speak.

On the basis of the argument that monetary policy is too important to leave to politicians, why do not we simply sub-contract the entire economy to Goldman Sachs? Sir Bryan Hopkin and Sir Douglas Wass, in evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in 1993, said:

"It is not desirable, or indeed even possible, to earmark particular instruments to particular objectives as if they had no wider repercussions."

One of the most important arguments against an independent central bank concerns accountability. I do not accept the argument that monetary policy is a neutral instrument outside politics that is too difficult and arcane to be handled by politicians.

Sir Bryan Hopkin and Sir Douglas Wass went on:

"It is not the job of central bankers to judge how far it is right to go in damaging the standard of living of some members of the community or destroying the jobs of others . . . These are broad matters as much of social welfare as of economics. The decisions of Ministers may not escape criticism; they rarely do. But, that it is and should be their responsibility to make the decisions seems to us to follow from the nature of the decisions and the way they work."

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor would argue that his proposals for a Monetary Policy Committee and for oversight by the Treasury Select Committee ensure accountability for the Bank's actions in future. I think it extremely unlikely that members of the Monetary Policy Committee will line up and vote against the Governor; his influence will be decisive. The Treasury Select Committee can bring an element of transparency to the process, but it cannot make the Bank genuinely accountable, because it has no sanctions.

If the Treasury Select Committee is seriously to be given oversight, it will need a budget to commission outside research. I would argue that it will also need the power to hold confirmatory hearings with the Governor and with members of the Monetary Policy Committee. Oversight without sanctions is a dead letter.

It is with great reluctance that I debate this issue. The country, business, industry, the professions, the people of Hackney and the people of Dunfermline are solidly united behind the Labour Government and look forward to their continuing for at least a decade of triumphant rule.

If we forget the siren voices of fashion—nothing is more pernicious in economic management than fashionable ideas—the academic basis for independence is not as sound as people say. The examples should give us pause, and there are serious implications for democracy.

9.57 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech. As this is a debate of substance, I shall try to keep the maiden speech formalities to a minimum. That should be easy, as I represent Twickenham, which I hope that most hon. Members will have heard of, so I need not make an extensive Cook's tour of the constituency.

My predecessor, Mr. Jessel, served on the Back Benches for 27 years. It was never entirely clear to his constituents whether that was conscious career planning or merely the result of oversight by a succession of Conservative leaders. Whatever the reason, he applied himself assiduously to the duties of a constituency Member. He worked hard on his constituents' behalf, and many people have spoken warmly of his contribution in solving their individual problems.

Mr. Jessel fought hard on particular constituency issues. Hon. Members of long standing will remember the case of the Kneller Hall Royal Military school of music, which he fought hard to save. It was said in the 1980s that Ministers and officials in the Ministry of Defence were spending more time worrying about the problem of military music than about the future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, largely at his insistence. His campaign was successful, but if officials in the MOD are relieved at his passing, I must tell them that I intend to fight equally hard for that institution and others, if they are threatened by the Government.

I disagreed with almost everything that the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said, but she deserves credit for having brought an important issue—probably the most important decision that the Government have yet made—to the attention of the House.

I shall briefly rehearse the central arguments why central bank independence is important and why so many Governments have followed that policy. The first is the need for an institution that is clearly and unambiguously committed to low and stable inflation. We take low inflation for granted, but we forget the corrosive effect of cumulatively high rates of inflation.

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

If I can revert briefly to the game with the round ball rather than the oval one, back in 1966, German football supporters visiting this country for the world cup required DM12 for every £1. Those who came back last year for the European cup required less than DM3, despite some appreciation of the pound in previous months. That is a measure of the experience of monetary incontinence under Governments of both major parties.

Inflation is a corrosive phenomenon that has continually undermined the competitiveness of British industry and has required endless and often humiliating devaluations to recoup the loss of competitiveness. I have never understood why people on the left feel that inflation is unimportant, because all the evidence suggests that the main victims of inflation are the poor. They do not have the resources or capacity to hedge against inflation, they do not have people to bargain on their behalf and they suffer more than anyone else.

That is not only a British experience: the countries of south America, such as Argentina and Brazil, that have reverted from high inflation to low inflation with the help of independent banks had previously suffered high levels of inequality produced by inflation. It is now universally accepted, in Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world, including New Zealand and the United States, and in south America and Russia, that Governments need a bulwark against inflation. Independent central banks provide that.

The reason why it is important for central banks not to suffer day-to-day political intervention is that it is difficult for such intervention to be successful, because of the long lags in economic policy. It is usually necessary to raise interest rates long before inflation appears. We know that politicians can be courageous in making difficult decisions about monetary austerity. Lord Jenkins and Lord Healey have, in the past, forced through many painful decisions to bring down inflation, but they always acted too late. They—or, rather, their predecessors—should have acted in advance of inflation appearing. That is what a technically based, independent central bank can do.

The second basic reason why independence is important relates to interest rates. We know from long experience that markets always discount inflation. Long-term interest rates in Britain are consistently higher than those in other European countries, notably in Germany, and people pay a price for that. Companies pay a higher price for long-term capital. Individuals suffer, and the national debt is inflated unnecessarily by high interest rates. An independent central bank should get those down, as we saw from the market reaction to the Chancellor's announcement a few weeks ago.

We need to achieve a climate of long-termism in British industry. I am sure that that is an issue that is close to the heart of the Minister who will reply to the debate. It is important.

I have left British industry from a company that engaged in 25-year planning. Industry often has a long-term outlook, but I was fortunate to work for a company, Shell, that was in a strong financial position, with very little debt, and that was internationally diversified so that it did not have to worry about exchange rate fluctuations. However, British companies that are highly dependent on bank debt and the value of sterling can be destabilised by erratic monetary policy. British industry's outlook has been so short-term because of the way that monetary policy has been conducted. It is not in the nature of capitalism to be short-term: it is the way that our policy has been conducted.

Independent central banks have a general problem with accountability, which was the core of the argument by the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington. How do Governments ensure democratic control over one of the core elements of economic policy? That is a genuine dilemma, and different countries have struggled with it in different ways. The analogy I choose is with the military. Clearly, the military have to be under political control, but no Government in their right mind would insist that battlefield commanders should be directed in their tactics in the field. We have to separate broad political control from day-to-day management.

The model that the Government have chosen, which is based on American experience rather than German, is correct, and the Liberal Democrats fully support it. Although we agree with the Government's broad approach and the model that they have chosen, we are critical of some aspects of the Government's approach.

The Government have not consulted much, and the decision was sprung on the country, industry and the City. The decision could have been taken with more consultation. My hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) has shown how that could be done. Some time ago, he prepared a statement of the possibilities for a UK reserve bank. He discussed his proposals with the City and the Governor of the Bank of England, and received feedback. That is the model that the Government should have followed. They will have time to do so when the legislation is considered, but the decision was taken very peremptorily.

Another of my criticisms relates to the way in which the members of what is now called the Interim Monetary Committee are chosen. The people who have been chosen are undoubtedly of high quality, and congratulations are due on that. I can vouch for at least one, who was a predecessor of mine at Shell as chief economist. That person is technically competent and, to the best of my knowledge, politically independent. She is able to draw on the experience of the United States and British industry.

My predecessor, Charles Goodhart and Willem Buiter have high technical standards, but the way they were chosen could be improved. For example, members of the monetary committee could be interviewed by the Treasury Select Committee, as they would be in the United States, their views exposed, and their experiences examined and approved by the House. That would add to the democratic content of accountability.

Another measure that could, and probably should, be taken is to extend the members' periods of office. They are presently vulnerable to political interference. Their contracts will expire before the life of this Government, but extending their contracts to five or six years would give them the necessary security and political independence.

I have another criticism, which is apparently trivial, but has important substance—the name of the Bank of England, which sends the wrong signals. I spent the early part of my political career in Scotland, and I have some sensitivity to the fact that we are a United Kingdom.

We are a country of differing regions. Scotland has a different level of house ownership from England, and levels of unemployment differ greatly from one part of the country to another. Those regional experiences should be reflected by the people who make decisions on monetary policy. We would like a regional system of directors, as well as those with outside academic expertise.

The Liberal Democrats strongly support the Government's decision, both its principle and the model that they have chosen. However, it is important to stress that it is a necessary rather than a sufficient condition for good economic policy. If the Government were to allow the Bank of England to operate independently and to pursue an austere approach to the management of money while not disciplining their fiscal policy, we would quickly experience high interest rates, appreciating sterling and considerable damaging side effects. A necessary corollary of the Government's actions on the monetary front is a similar discipline on fiscal policy. We shall see in the Budget whether that commitment is there.

10.8 am

Mr. Stephen Timms (East Ham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on securing an important debate this morning. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on an excellent and well-argued speech. He is an economist by training and, until recently, by occupation, and the House will look forward to hearing more from him in the years ahead.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington said, few—if any—decisions taken by the Chancellor of the Exchequer have been greeted with quite such acclaim as the decision to hand control of interest rates to the Bank of England. Press comment was enthusiastic. Will Hutton in *The Guardian* said that it was part of a process of modernising the British state. I noticed that he also said:

"Advocate Bank of England independence, and it's never long before"

Montagu

"Norman . . . is being used to scare us witless of the perils and dangers ahead."

As my hon. Friend demonstrated, Will Hutton was at least right about that. The *Financial Times* described the decision as "unequivocal good news"; *The Economist* said that it was "welcome and long overdue" and described it as a "political masterstroke".

It is perhaps not surprising that the economic great and good welcomed the decision. However, not only Fleet street journalists were pleased. My hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) mentioned industrialists in his area. I have lost count of the number of constituents in East Ham—very close to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington—who have expressed their delight at the new Government's performance. When I have asked what changes they have been pleased about, most have mentioned the decision on the Bank of England.

The decision has sparked enthusiasm across the country, because the message it sends is completely of a piece with the new Government's approach—characterised by boldness, implementing solutions that work in practice, and rejecting dogma.

The Government want to work in partnership with the nation's institutions, not go to war with them. They are committed to stability in place of the pursuit of short-lived booms that marked the previous Government's period of office. That is the popular view of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's decision, and one of the key reasons why the immediate euphoria that followed the election has not yet started to recede. As we understand it, we have the most popular Government since polling records began, and this decision and the way in which it was made go a long way to explaining why.

Of course some have criticised the decision—not only my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington—but nobody should underestimate the importance to the Government of the wave of enthusiasm that we are enjoying, which is due in no small part to the one decision, and how it is helping them to achieve the programme on which we were all elected.

I am an avid reader of *Tribune*. An article in the current issue written by one of my hon. Friends describes the decision as

"delivering policy to the enemy"

and

"a gesture which . . . conciliates only our enemies".

The decision also conciliates many people who are not our enemies; many who wanted a new Labour Government who would be radical and trustworthy, and who feel that that is what they have got. The new Government will not play fast and loose with people's money, and it would be a fatal error to believe that only our enemies would be anxious if it were otherwise.

To be successful, do not the new Government have to consign to the dustbin the idea that large parts of the economy constitute our enemy? Such an idea can only be a recipe for the disastrous and debilitating strife that has so damaged Labour Governments in the past. We would fail if we went down that road again. We are on a different road now, and we shall succeed. We want partnership, not warfare. That is another reason why the nation is in such good heart.

The Commission on Public Policy and British Business, whose report "Promoting Prosperity: A Business Agenda for Britain" so enraged the then Deputy Prime Minister when it was launched in January, devotes one of its 10 chapters to macro-economic stability, which it describes as

"probably the most important aspect of the economic framework for most companies".

The article in the *Tribune* said that "stability is dead easy". Perhaps it is, but the previous Government conspicuously failed to achieve it, and the consequences were catastrophic: two disastrous recessions, consistently higher levels of inflation than our competitors. The pound in 1979 would be worth only 37p today. As the report on promoting prosperity pointed out, inflation has been not only high but, almost as bad, much more volatile than elsewhere. All that explains why we have been so conspicuously unsuccessful in attracting the investment we need for our factories, infrastructure and public services.

The view that an omnipotent Chancellor could outplay the markets and, through fancy footwork on interest rates, produce consistently better results for the economy than the Bank of England, has surely been absolutely

[Mr. Stephen Timms]

discredited by history. What examples back that up? In her excellent speech—I pay tribute to her very effective work on the Treasury Committee over a long period—my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington pointed to the previous Chancellor. What is his legacy?

"London homes in biggest price rise for ten years"

said the *Evening Standard* on 11 April.

"Gazumping is back and estate agents are driving Porsches again"

said the same newspaper last week.

We all know where that is leading, because we have been there before: boom and bust. We do not need that; we need stability instead. That is why the Commission on Public Policy and British Business proposed that the Government should

"give independence to the Bank of England to achieve the target through the control of interest rates"—

quite rightly making the point that the dangers of instability are particularly acute for a Labour Chancellor.

Instability has crippled Labour Governments in the past, so that all their energy has been consumed in fighting one economic crisis after another. This Labour Government will be different. They will be able to concentrate on delivering our programme—the reason why we were elected—of putting young people back to work, and tackling the scourge of long-term unemployment head on.

On a practical level, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's decision has brought us an immediate windfall, with long-term interest rates down by half of 1 per cent. in May compared with April, when, in Germany and the USA, they fell by only one tenth of 1 per cent. That is the kind of improvement in our performance that, when pursued consistently, systematically and with determination, can transform the prospects of our economy, of securing the investment that we need and of our constituents in Hackney, East Ham and across the country.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's decision on the new role of the Bank of England has set the economy on a new track for stability. On both sides of the House, as already throughout Britain, that should be welcomed and applauded.

10.16 am

Mr. Ivor Caplin (Hove): I am grateful for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. The House may be pleased to note that I did my apprenticeship on Monday, when I sat in the Chamber for six hours without being called. I had plenty of exercise jumping up and down.

This is a proud moment for me, and I thank the people of Hove and Portslade for giving me the great opportunity to serve as the town's first ever Labour Member of Parliament. I think that I am right in saying that, since the seat of Hove was created in 1950, I am the first new Member of Parliament to be elected at a general election rather than a by-election.

I thank my predecessor, Sir Timothy Sainsbury, for his hard work on behalf of people in my constituency. There is a remarkable coincidence concerning myself and Sir Tim—and it is not that we are both grocers. He was elected on 8 November 1973 in a by-election following the unexpected death of Martin Maddan. At that by-election, the Liberal candidate was Des Wilson, who may be known to some hon. Members. The coincidence is that 8 November 1973 was my 15th birthday, which gives away my age.

After his retirement from the House, Sir Tim made a significant private donation to Hove museum, which will allow a collection of rare films to be made available to local people. In 1896, Hove was the birthplace of modern cinema, and the collection will be significant for the museum. Before Sir Tim's election, he had a career with a well-known supermarket. During his parliamentary career, he worked in many Departments. Indeed, I believe that he went on to deputise for the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) during his illness. I place on record my thanks to Sir Tim Sainsbury.

My constituency epitomises the dramatic political change that has taken place. Such change occurred nowhere more so than in the south-east, where the economic and political complacency of the previous Government, coupled with new Labour's positive promise of new politics and a new start, had an enormous impact. I won in Hove because of the dramatic failure of the previous Government to deliver their promises on tax, crime and the economy. But the first sign of things to come was when Labour won the local elections in Hove in 1995. That election was significant, because it gave Hove and Portslade residents a new Labour council which had a two-year opportunity to prove that Labour could deliver what it promised. I was delighted to be the leader of that council until it merged with Brighton on 1 April 1997.

During those two years, we put in place plans to rehouse the residents of a decaying block of flats called Portland Gate. In partnership with others, we produced a new scheme for community housing in its place. The Minister of State, Departments of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) helped me to start the demolition of Portland Gate recently, thus beginning a new era for social housing in that part of my constituency.

During the council's short term of office, we also cut the price of bus passes for Hove pensioners, as we pledged we would. My council was supportive of those pensioners, and they welcomed that support only to find that they then had to pay VAT on their heating and for cooking. That is a matter to which the pensioners in my constituency objected strongly, and they voted accordingly on 1 May.

Hove is a very special place, in which I live and have lived all my life. At the election, I pledged to continue to live in the constituency with my family, and that is what I intend to do.

Hove could be described as a good-looking town, with some fine buildings and open spaces. Indeed, I am sure that, were she in the Chair, Madam Speaker would agree, because she visited the town in the summer to commemorate one of our famous residents, the suffragette Victoria Liddiard. In Hove and Portslade, we also have many good businesses and local employers. It is also a commuter town, with many people, like me, travelling up and down to London each day.

Behind that facade, however, Hove suffers from high youth unemployment, and it has an elderly population who need to be supported. We also have our share of low-paid and low-skilled jobs. I am pleased that the new council is working hard in partnership with business to attract new employers to the area.

Although I am the Member for Hove, colleagues may have noticed that I have referred occasionally to my constituency as Hove and Portslade. Portslade is a unique area of my constituency, with an attractive village centre and a thriving street of shops. At the sea end lies the entrance to Shoreham port, the scene of angry protests just two years ago when the port took the ill-advised decision to export live animals.

Under the Labour Government, I look forward to working with our European partners to stamp out that cruel practice. I and my constituents are pleased to note that the strong leadership that Britain needs to show in Europe is already evident from the work of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.

I should like to follow the new convention apparent in other maiden speeches by mentioning the constituency football team. I have supported Brighton and Hove Albion since I was a boy. Many hon. Members may be aware of the problems that the club has faced and is still facing, largely as a result of the actions of the previous owner, Mr. Bill Archer, and his chief executive and a former Member, David Bellotti. Having said that, I offer my commiserations to the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch), because our final day draw meant that the Albion stayed in the football league at Hereford's expense. If I were asked to choose between the last 20 minutes of that game and the tension of election night, there would be no contest.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) for initiating this morning's debate. Before 1 May, I had worked in the private sector for nearly 20 years. Indeed, for all that time I was employed by a financial services company, so I would like to think that I am able to say what businesses would like from Government to help them in their endeavours.

The most important factor for any business, large or small, is stability. I support without reservation the decision of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I know from my postbag that many businesses in my constituency are solidly behind his decision. In my view, it will stop politicians such as the former Chancellor cutting interest rates just before a party conference so that he could go on stage to brag, and then putting them back up according to political whim. That is why the Bank of England's independence to set interest rates is important.

That decision has generated confidence in the business community. We have already noted in the six weeks since polling day that if there is confidence and stability, the market grows. That has happened because new Labour has shown that we can run the economy in the long term for all the people.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) said, a new mood is sweeping the country. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues at the Treasury on helping to create that mood by their decision to give the Bank of England the freedom to set interest rates. History will show that that decision was widely supported.

I should like to thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden speech. As one of my hon. Friends said to me yesterday, I now feel like a real Member of Parliament.

10.25 am

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I should also like to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on her courage to stand up against the latest fashion or fetish to hand power over monetary policy to the Bank of England. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) on their excellent maiden speeches. Their predecessors will be remembered with affection by colleagues on both sides of the House. Those of us who have been in the House for some time knew them both, and will remember them with such affection.

I admire the confidence with which those maiden speakers contributed to a debate on a rather arcane and complicated subject. In particular, I admire the certainty, I will not say absolutism, of the hon. Member for Twickenham. He offered us a clear exposition of how central bank independence would solve so many of our problems. At the end of his speech, however, a note of doubt crept in. Perhaps when he was a high-powered executive with Shell he was not allowed to show such a feeling, but now we are in the business of politics. That doubt stemmed from his belief that the Government's decision was a necessary but not a sufficient condition of economic policy.

Mr. Radice: Quite right.

Mr. Davies: I note my hon. Friend's comment.

The hon. Member for Twickenham then asked about fiscal policy, responsibility for which is still left with politicians, whom we cannot trust. What really concerned me was the implication in his speech that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will play fast and loose with the country's money.

That is not a good message to send out. It appears to say," I, the Chancellor, am not a man you can trust. You have just elected me, but you cannot trust me with your money. I may be the Chancellor, but I will do terrible things to your interest rates. I will play fast and loose with your money. You will still allow me to increase taxes, or not, as the case might be. You have still put me in charge of public expenditure, but presumably I'm not to be trusted with that, either."

That is a quite extraordinary message for us politicians to send out. The idea is that, when it comes to the Bank of England and other quangoes, we politicians can no longer be trusted. Because of that, we must transfer power to the Bank of England. Then we wonder why the public do not trust us very much and feel alienated from us. But if we tell them that they cannot trust us with their money, of all things, we cannot expect them to take us seriously.

I was saddened by the hon. Gentleman's implication about the Chancellor, whom I have known for a long time. I have a high regard for him and I would trust him with my money, but, apparently, colleagues on both sides of the House are not prepared to do so.

[Mr. Davies]

As I have said, the hon. Member for Twickenham referred to my right hon. Friend's decision as a necessary but not sufficient condition of economic policy. The Government still have power over fiscal budgetary policy. The hon. Gentleman said that we had to be careful to do something about that to stop those terrible bankers putting interest rates too high.

Dr. Cable: No.

Mr. Davies: It is no good for the hon. Gentleman denying it, because that is exactly what he said. If interest rates are set too high, the value of the pound might go up. The hon. Gentleman may say that that is right, but I understood from reading Mr. Gavyn Davies and other people who write in the newspapers that the sole criterion for fixing interest rates would be domestic. I understood that the sole criterion would be hitting the inflation target—it is an odd sort of target of "2.5 per cent. or less", and I am not sure how one hits a target that is not precise, but there we are. Perhaps we shall be told about such things when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer makes a speech at the Mansion House or somewhere.

We were told that we could not have bankers putting up interest rates too much, as that would affect the pound. That is totally irrelevant, as we have now given them independence. We are now saying, "Let us use budgetary policy and put up taxes, so that we can stop the bankers putting up interest rates." But this morning, hon. Members have said what a marvellous thing it is to split monetary policy from fiscal policy.

I am not an economist, and I cannot understand those long equations that always end in zero, but I can see that the United States of America has a splendid Federal Bank, and a high budget deficit. It has been struggling to reduce it ever since President Reagan was in office. Germany has a very high budget deficit.

Mr. Radice: Because of east Germany.

Mr. Davies: My hon. Friend says that that is because of east Germany, and it probably is. But I have it on respected academic authority that there is considerable instability in the bond markets in the world. One reason, it is said—neither I nor anyone else can prove it—is that, over the past 10 or 15 years, we have begun to separate budgetary policy from fiscal policy. As a result, Governments will reflate the economy; because they cannot now touch interest rates, they will achieve the aim in a different way. The argument is not one-sided.

I do not believe that we should be slaves to every jot and comma in our manifesto—apparently that is the latest fashion these days, but I do not believe it. Obviously, economic crises arise and action has to be taken, but in this case there could have been consultation.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Davies: I shall give way in a moment.

The manifesto made it quite clear that we were to reform the Bank of England to create a monetary committee. I agree with that—the advice from the Governor always tended to be too narrowly based. We said the same thing in the business manifesto, which is important. It states:

"We propose a new monetary policy committee"—

that is quite right—

"to decide on the advice which the Bank of England should give to the chancellor."

It did not mention the other policy, and no form of casuistry or sophistry from the Treasury Bench can explain that away.

I have a little question to ask my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary. I am just a pedantic lawyer, but I should like to know on what authority the monetary committee of the Bank of England made its decision on interest rates last week . It decided to put them up, but that is irrelevant. The Queen's Speech states:

"a Bill will be introduced to give the Bank of England operational responsibility for setting interest rates".

The Bill has not arrived yet, and I have tabled a question asking when it will. I have received no answer.

I then tabled a question asking on what authority the grand people—the brilliant economists—decided to put up people's interest rates by a quarter of 1 per cent. I thought that I might get an answer from my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary, but I did not. She merely answered:

"Operational responsibility for setting official interest rates has been transferred to the Bank of England."—[*Official Report*, 10 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. *395*.]

I know that. I was asking what the authority was.

We were told in the Queen's Speech that there would be a Bill—presumably it was thought at the time that a Bill was necessary—to transfer operational responsibility. I was a bit surprised, as I thought that, under the Bank of England Act 1946—the terrible nationalisation Act under which directives could be issued—a letter to the Governor telling him what he could do would have been sufficient. Perhaps I was wrong.

I know that this is a small, pedantic, legal point, but I hope that my hon. Friend can tell us on what authority those people in the Bank of England are deciding the interest rates that I would have to pay if I had an overdraft and that companies in my constituency are having to pay. Why has the Bill not been introduced? Is there a formal document? Has a letter been sent out, or what? I should like an answer.

10.34 am

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Many people may be surprised to see me here today giving my maiden speech—none more so than David Congdon, my predecessor, who served for 16 years on Croydon council and was its deputy leader. I have served for 11 years on Croydon council and entered Parliament as its leader. Therefore, David Congdon and I are old sparring partners. I remember with fond affection looking across the chamber at him while making my contribution, and him shouting, "Rubbish" at me. Beyond the heat of political exchange, David Congdon is a mild-mannered person of considerable ability, devoted to the good of the town. I have no hesitation in stating my appreciation of him for his long record of service to the town.

Croydon—and Croydon, Central, which I represent—is more than just a town. It is an emerging European city that commands one fifth of the capital's economy, and the largest London borough . As leader of the council, I participated in the formation of a partnership that put Croydon at the centre of business investment in the south-east. The council has inspired the new tram link that will be London's flagship for environmentally friendly transport systems. It has brought about a renaissance in culture in the south of London—in terms of the new Warehouse theatre, the Fairfield halls redevelopment, and a planned new venue in east Croydon that we see as an international business and music centre for the south of London.

However, what makes Croydon Croydon is the rich diversity of people in it. I am a case in point: some hon. Members may be saying, "Who is this bloke? He is a Welshman in exile." But I am the second Geraint to represent Croydon. The first, Geraint Williams, represented Croydon for 17 years. Recent representatives of Croydon, from my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) to Lord Bernard Weatherill, have all understood the importance of supporting the rich tapestry of cultures in Croydon.

The constituency has about 80,000 electors, and extends from the north, from south Norwood, down through the Manhattan skyline of Croydon, to New Addington—I have been proud to represent that unique community for 11 years. The people of Croydon and New Addington are looking towards the new Government, not just to provide safer streets, smaller class sizes and a greater London authority, but to deliver prosperity and jobs for the future.

The ingredients for that success include the empowerment of the individual through training and education, partnership with industry and taking a leading approach in the future of our Europe. We must not lose sovereignty in the name of defending it; instead, we must robustly champion Britain's interests in a new Europe. That means putting jobs—whether in terms of youth employment, the long-term unemployed, small businesses or cutting bureaucracy—at the top of the agenda. It is about getting Europe back to work.

Central to that aim is the creation of conditions for long-term investment in Britain. That means that we need an environment in which short-term interest rates are not set according to political considerations, but in the best interests of our economy.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's decision to delegate operational responsibility for setting interest rates was a master stroke, which delivered overnight a reduction in the long-term borrowing costs of British industry. It was a master stroke which brought about a system of accountability enabling my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to intervene in a crisis. He will not intervene before polling day in order to keep interest rates artificially low—which we have seen—but will use the policy to enable us to pursue our long-term interests.

Some hon. Members may say, "What about Eddie George—he has just put up interest rates by another quarter per cent?"; but we have just seen £28 billion of consumer spending pushed into the economy through the flotation of building societies—that amount was forecast as £21 billion in February. At a time when the housing market is also taking off, that marginal increase was inevitable, irrespective of who was in charge.

As for exchange rates, the key to maintaining stable exchange rates for the future is low inflation, and the key to that is proper independent management of interest rates. The long-term borrowing rates are down, even though the short-term rates have gone up, which shows that what has been done is correct.

Others have said that, having got into power, we have given away power to the Bank of England. In reality, there is a system of accountability; in addition, responsibility for the supervision of high street banks has been taken away from the Bank of England and given to the Securities and Investments Board. Taken together, therefore, the reforms narrow the responsibility of the Bank of England to manage monetary policy.

Some have asked, what about consultation? In reality, long periods of consultation and uncertainty would have whipped up the money markets, which would have sent up interest rates and resulted in lower investment and higher mortgage rates. It would have been an irresponsible thing to do. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made the right decision, with great courage. His decision allows us to set interest rates within the wider objectives of inflation and economic growth, and, in so doing, avoid creating damaging short-term swings in interest rates and investment.

The reform is an example of best practice taken from across the globe. We have replaced a system which places a risk premium on British jobs with one that is in the British interest—the economic gain is clear. Some say that the Chancellor's range of choices has been reduced, but the choices would have been made in any case—it was only a matter of timing. More fundamentally, the operational response of the Bank in setting interest rates is, of course, framed by the inflation bandings laid down by the Chancellor. Those, in turn, are set by our manifesto objectives of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

The reform is not about losing control; it is about creating the conditions to succeed in jobs, prosperity and growth. It is great news for Britain and for Croydon. I am proud to make my maiden speech today, and doubly proud because, in Labour's first month of government, my wife has given birth to our second daughter. It is time for a change, and I do not mean only of nappies. It is time for a new Britain, in a new Europe, in a new millennium.

10.41 am

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): This has been an extremely interesting debate, and one of the few opportunities we have had since the new Government took office to probe and question an important and fundamental change in the way in which economic policy is to be set in the United Kingdom. To that end, I welcome the new Economic Secretary to the Dispatch Box, and I wish her well at the Treasury.

I congratulate the hon. Members for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), for Hove (Mr. Caplin) and for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) on their maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Croydon, Central showed that he will be a real asset to the Labour Whips, because he performed well in a short time, and sat down when required. He will be doing a lot of that in future. I was also grateful to all three new Members for their kind words about my former colleagues, Toby Jessel, Tim Sainsbury and David Congdon, who will appreciate the remarks of their successors.

[Mr. Michael Jack]

I also congratulate the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) on having maintained her reputation for robustness and independence of thinking by challenging, in a wholly un-Mandelsonlike way, the accepted treatise followed by the Labour party. She must have read the article by Anatole Kaletsky in *The Times*, published shortly after the announcement was made. The headline was "A steel cage for the Iron Chancellor" and it said:

"Brown is throwing away the key to policy".

I remember the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) saying that Labour had waited 18 years to get control, but was now giving it all away. We have often seen in the new Government's policies the Pontius Pilate approach to politics—"Not me, guv. I'll give the decision to somebody else." The hon. Lady carefully probed the question of accountability.

I am lucky enough to be a former Treasury Minister and one who has sat where decisions on monetary policy are made, so I am one of the few people who can comment with a degree of authority on the former system, which led my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) to deliver this country's best inflation record for 50 years. The hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington was kind to record my right hon. and learned Friend's achievements in that respect, and in those remarks she got to the heart of the matter.

The heart of the matter when setting interest rates—whether they are set by the Bank of England or any other body—is the degree of judgment that can be exercised in determining the decisions. The hon. Lady put her finger on it, saying that, when my right hon. and learned Friend had to make a decision of his own volition, he had to—in the nicest sense—out-guess the experts; and he got it right. No one group of people has a monopoly on wisdom and knowledge. Setting interest rate objectives requires feel, touch and sensitivity.

I asked the Economic Secretary to use her Treasury model and expertise to work out, given current levels of economic activity, what levels of interest rates would be required to achieve a series of parameters. Her response was remarkable, given the degree of expertise that still—believe it or not—abounds in the Treasury. She wrote:

"it is not possible to be sure about the precise level of interest rates required to hit an exact inflation rate ten months ahead."—[*Official Report*, 3 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. *147*.]

I agree that it is difficult, as is any element of economic forecasting; but the old scheme, whereby we had a mixture of politics, with its degree of flexibility, married with the comment and detail from the experts from the Bank of England and the world of commerce—no Treasury Minister, Bank of England or monetary committee is ever short of advice on what to do about interest rates; it comes in by the bucket load—meant that the feel and touch of a real human being, a politician who could sense factors that experts do not, made an important difference.

One of the sacrifices made by taking the present route is that interest rates will be set at a higher level than would otherwise be the case, because the Bank of England has to hit an inflationary target. In parliamentary questions, I probed the matter of the period over which the Bank was supposed to hit the target, what sanctions would be imposed if it did not do so, and how the Bank would be made accountable; however, I got no answers other than, "Watch this space for the Mansion House speech."

I hope that the Economic Secretary will convey to the Chancellor the message that we will watch that speech very carefully, because we want to see some numbers. So far, all we have had is great headlines and lots of chat, but no facts and figures.

I asked the Economic Secretary about the time scale over which the Bank of England would be required to achieve the new inflation target, and was told:

"The Chancellor will set out the Government's approach to monetary policy in his Mansion House speech".—[*Official Report*, 4 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. *181*.]

When I asked about the definitions of various elements of price stability, growth and so on, I was told that the Government would not set growth or employment targets. How are we to judge the setting of the inflation target? On what basis will that be done?

I challenge the Minister to put into the public domain her Department's monthly monetary forecast—or perhaps even that has been done away with. That was a jolly good Treasury document, which gave a really good assessment and enabled us to understand how the inflation target was to be set. The Government believe in openness, but there must be openness on both sides; it is no use having only the minutes from the newly independent Bank of England to look at—we want to know the Treasury's view, because it is also part of the monitoring process.

When I asked about how the Chancellor would resolve any difference of opinion between the Governor and Chancellor on the Government's objectives for growth and employment—both unspecified—and the achievement of price stability, I was again told, "Watch this space for the Mansion House speech." It will have to be a hell of a speech if it is to answer all those questions.

How are such differences to be resolved? In his article, Kaletsky asks:

"what will happen when the Bank and the Government start to disagree about where the economy should be going?"

It is all very well having that wonderful independence in the good times, but what will happen in the bad times? We have seen Germany, with its independent bank, trying to deal with the German economy and the strictures of inflation getting in the way of the sound of the unemployed crying for the economy to be expanded. We have yet to test the difficult decisions resulting from having an independent Bank of England.

When I asked how we will identify the numerical targets of the Government's economic policies, so that we can monitor what is happening, the reply again referred me to the Mansion House speech. When I asked how differences were to be resolved, I was given a restatement of what was in the Chancellor's statement to the House of Commons on 20 May.

We are owed much more information about how, for example, the inflation target is to be set. If the Chancellor of the day wants to manipulate the Bank of England—for all its independence—he can choose a lax inflation target and so give us low interest rates.

We have heard nothing from the Chancellor about what he thinks will be the potential for inflation in the British economy. Does he think it could be 2.3 per cent? Could it

be 2.2 per cent? That will have a profound effect on what the Bank of England will do when setting future interest rates. We need to know the basis for those decisions, so that we can judge how well the Bank, in its new way of working, is doing.

On another occasion, I was told that the Government would retain the right to override the Bank's operational independence in extreme circumstances, for a limited period only. What on earth does that mean? I was told that further details would be made available when the draft Bill was introduced in the House. We have searched, but no answers are forthcoming.

There are a great number of unanswered questions about how the whole operation will be run. The Opposition will carefully probe those issues. I hope that the Chancellor's Mansion House speech will supply the details that will enable us to understand precisely what is going on in this new world.

10.50 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) was successful in securing this debate on such a significant issue. It is a key element of the Government's tone that we were not prepared to wait to get the grounding for stability into the economy; we wanted to do it as quickly as possible.

The Government recognise my hon. Friend's sterling work on the Treasury Select Committee. She has pursued a distinctive line on central bank independence and we acknowledge her commitment to that. When I was doing some background reading of the Select Committee's reports in preparation for the debate, I noticed that my hon. Friend has very little regard for economists. For example, on one occasion she said:

"Economics is a happy hunting ground for charlatans."

As an economist who went into politics, I must be on a downward slide. Perhaps I should assure Arthur Daley that I have no intention of becoming a used car salesman. Perhaps my position is mitigated by the fact that my hon. Friend then said:

"This is partly because it is dominated by men."

At least I am off the hook on that count.

We have had an interesting debate, with interesting and commendable maiden speeches from the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) and my hon. Friends the Members for Hove (Mr. Caplin) and for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies). They were outstanding introductions to the House. As someone who only recently made her own maiden speech, I know what it feels like to stand up and speak in the Chamber for the first time. I had a great sense of déjà vu when the hon. Member for Twickenham spoke, because my formative days in economics were spent in debate with him in Glasgow. Indeed, in those days he had a very different political viewpoint.

Like all my right hon. and hon. Friends, I was delighted by the victories in Hove and in Croydon, Central. I am sure that we all wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central on the happy event for his family—new Labour, new baby. I am sure that his child will enjoy growing up under a Labour Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington referred to universal acclaim for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's statement. I note the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), that it was not just universal acclaim from the City and the financial institutions, but universal acclaim from the people. As recently as Saturday, at Shotts highland games—hardly the usual scenario for talking about monetary policy—I was assailed by people wanting to congratulate the Government on their decision on the Bank of England.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington made a number of points about the statistical background to the concept that a central independent bank and low levels of inflation are related. She mentioned the issue of causation. It is always difficult conclusively to prove cause and effect. However, there are a number of recent examples, such as New Zealand, where countries with a history of high inflation have moved to a central independent bank and benefited from a consequent fall in inflation. We must bear such important elements in mind.

A number of hon. Members said that setting and maintaining low levels of inflation is important for the economy, as well as for individual households. As a Labour Member, I am conscious that, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham said, it is the poorest in society who suffer from high inflation. A considerable amount of academic work has been done since the Treasury Select Committee report on an independent central bank. There is considerable evidence of a relationship between an independent central bank and low inflation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington and the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) referred to removing political judgment from the setting of monetary policy. That is precisely what it is all about. My hon. Friend the Member for East Ham said that, under the previous Government, there were repeated beauty parades, with the then Chancellor setting an interest rate immediately before the Conservative party conference, getting a standing ovation, and then making another change. That is not sound economics. It will not lead to the stability that is important for long-term growth.

The setting of interest rates is not the only monetary policy lever. To suggest that there is reduced accountability and a removal of the political imperatives to secure growth and to take into account social inclusion, is to fail to understand that the Monetary Policy Committee must operate within the parameters set by the Government's strategy for growth and stability within the economy. That is vital.

The right hon. Member for Fylde deserves sympathy, as not one member of his party has been here to support him—probably because they have other things on their minds. I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman's speech in praise of the former Chancellor is now being distributed. He may be nervous about what position he will be given by whoever emerges as the Conservative party leader.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be making a statement tomorrow night at the Mansion House, and the text will be available before that in the House. The targets for monetary policy will be laid out in my right hon. Friend's speech.

Accountability is important—we recognise the debate to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington and the hon. Member for Twickenham referred. My hon. Friend made some

[Mrs. Helen Liddell]

interesting proposals about the role of the Treasury Select Committee, especially in the appointment of members of the Monetary Policy Committee. When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor addressed the House, he made it clear that membership of that committee would be based on the need for recognisable expertise. The appointments that he has made so far have been universally recognised as taking that need into account.

It is, of course, possible for the Select Committee to summon before it not only members of the Monetary Policy Committee, but my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to account for those appointments. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington has made suggestions about how the Select Committee might operate in future, and we will carefully consider them. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is currently examining our procedures, so my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington might like to make representations to the new Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Ham referred to Montagu Norman. Indeed, other members also referred to him. To try to compare the current position with that which existed pre-1945 is to ignore completely the fact that much of the economic debate in those days related to the gold standard. The world has moved on, and the climate within which we operate has moved on. We must take into account modern developments in economics, and the experience of best practice in other parts of the world.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) asked on whose authority the Monetary Policy Committee met last week to set interest rates. It met on the authority of the Chancellor, who made it clear when he announced the changes to the Bank of England that he would expect it, as a signal of the Government's commitment to long-term stability in the economy, to begin its work immediately.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Liddell: I am sorry. My right hon. Friend will appreciate that I am under time constraints.

In terms of the timing of legislation that will come before the House, the Bank of England Bill is currently in preparation. With a fair wind, we could anticipate it at the end of the summer. I am sure that hon. Members recognise the Government's commitment to governing this country and getting legislation under way as quickly as possible. There are tight time constraints on us in terms of the legislative programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We now come to the next subject, Earth summit 2.

Earth Summit 2

11 am

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I am delighted to have this chance to introduce a debate on Earth summit 2, in particular on the theme of sustainable development. I welcome the Minister to the Front Bench and look forward to hearing what she has to say. I also welcome the presence of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the former Secretary of State, and my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), the former Under-Secretary.

It has long been my view that sustainable development is not just of supreme importance but is the supreme issue that political leaders must address. It is crucial for this country and for every country; it is crucial for this generation and for future generations. Those of us who live at a time of unparalleled prosperity and peace in a country where so many freedoms are taken for granted, as they are in Britain, have a responsibility to concern themselves with the environment more than ever. This generation are trustees. We are charged with a duty to protect and improve our inheritance. We have a duty not to damage our inheritance in pursuit of short-term goals, not to consume resources in a way that destroys that inheritance, and not to leave our children and grandchildren with a worse legacy than we inherited.

Important though the contest for the Conservative leadership is, and fascinating though the process of analysing last night's votes may be, both subjects pale into insignificance compared with the urgency and overriding importance of achieving the goal of sustainability. I warmly welcome the fact that the special session of the United Nations will be held in less than two weeks. A wide variety of issues will be debated. This morning, I wish to explore the issue of climate change, which, without being apocalyptic, I believe needs more attention than it currently receives. It is often referred to as "global warming". Given this country's normal climate, that sounds rather appealing—as though my constituents in South Suffolk will soon enjoy Mediterranean weather.

Climate change also has some unattractive elements, however. There are likely to be droughts in some parts of Britain and more frequent flooding in others. There will be more rain and snow, higher winds and more frequent gales. Crop yields in the south-east may decrease. There may be decreases in river flow in summer and increases in winter, and more storms and flooding in coastal areas. Not all those consequences are benign.

Around the world, the dangers are even more damaging. Rises in sea level threaten some parts of the world that have substantial concentrations of population. As the Association of Small Island States pointed out, the economies of some islands—for instance, Caribbean islands such as Barbados—will be severely damaged by surges in sea levels. Climate change is therefore a potentially dangerous development.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, although it may be important to have a precautionary principle on climate change, climate change has been going on all the time? We should not be too frightened of it; otherwise we might have been frozen in the ice age.

Mr. Yeo: The real question is the extent to which human activity now contributes to climate change. Human activity

in the past 100 years has arguably led to a far more rapid rate of climate change than anything that occurred in the Earth's history. It is hard to be certain about the speed of climate change. Scientists have rightly been reluctant to be dogmatic about the precise causes. I welcome the best scientists' tendency to understate their conclusions, but, to a layman such as myself, it seems at least possible that climate change may be occurring faster than some people estimate. The inadequacy of the data available, which prevents bodies such as the intergovernmental panel on climate change from exaggerating the dangers, may be concealing the pace at which climate change is occurring.

Against that background, the world cannot stand idly by when the concentration of greenhouse gases, for instance, has reached twice the level of the pre-industrial age—twice the level that prevailed throughout the world's history. We cannot stand idly by and not deal with issues such as the need to cut the growth in carbon dioxide emissions. I pay a warm tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal for the work that he did when he was Secretary of State and to the progress that was made in cutting carbon dioxide emissions and moving commendably towards the original target set under the last Government.

I also warmly welcome the new Government's commitment to achieving a cut of 20 per cent. from 1990 levels by 2010. As the Prime Minister has taken such pains to stress that the Government will keep their promises, he would not have allowed that commitment to be made without knowing pretty clearly with what policies it will be achieved. That question is particularly interesting because the only firm policy commitment relevant to that objective to have been announced so far will have the opposite effect. The decision to reduce the rate of VAT on fuel from 8 to 5 per cent. will increase carbon dioxide emissions. Achieving a 20 per cent. cut in just over a decade will require immediate action. I hope that the Minister will set out the policies that will be followed.

I note the recommendation of the Government's panel on sustainable development that

"the Government should in future prepare and publish an overall assessment of the environmental consequences of measures in its annual Budget."

I hope that the Minister will confirm that the Government will do that on 2 July. In case she hesitates, I refer her to *Hansard* of 4 December 1996, when the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms Ruddock), the then spokesman for the Labour party on the environment, contributed to a debate that I introduced on sustainable development. She said:

"each year we will publish a 'green book' alongside the Chancellor's Red Book, setting out the environmental implications of Government policy."—[*Official Report*, 4 December 1996; Vol. 286, c. 991.]

I hope that the Minister will confirm that that will be done.

Will the policies followed to achieve the 20 per cent. target include a greater use of market instruments? I hope that the Minister will say whether the Deputy Prime Minister knows what market instruments are. In answer to an oral question of mine about whether sustainability in transport policy would be promoted through greater use of market instruments, the Deputy Prime Minister told me on the Floor of the House that people who

"have been subjected to the privatisation of the bus services . . . will not agree with that policy."—[*Official Report*, 3 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. 181.]

That appeared to be a rejection of the greater use of market instruments, but it may merely have been that the Deputy Prime Minister was not clear what they were.

I hope that the Minister will also tell us a little more about the Government's proposals for transport. For example, will we see a differential rate of vehicle excise duty to encourage the use of more fuel-efficient cars? Will road pricing be used to encourage an environmentally responsible use of cars? If Britain is to continue to exercise a leading influence in international debates, it will not be enough for us just to set a challenging target; we need credible policies to support that target, and those will need to be announced quickly if our word in international debates is to be listened to.

When the Deputy Prime Minister spoke last week at the Royal Geographical Society, he said that the Government would place a high priority on energy efficiency, among a number of other priorities. Are the Government prepared to lead by example? What targets are being set to improve energy efficiency in the buildings on the Government's own estate? If VAT on fuel is to be cut to 5 per cent., will the same rate of VAT be introduced for energy-saving materials? Will there be a cut from the present 17.5 per cent. rate for those materials, or do the Government intend to perpetuate the incentive to consume but not to conserve?

Will the Government support a proposal that I made in the last Parliament, whereby mortgage lenders should require house surveys to include an energy rating before a mortgage is offered? That is a simple and low-cost way to promote more awareness among house buyers and sellers of what can be done to make homes more energy efficient.

The introduction of such measures in the United Kingdom is the only foundation for any claim by the Government to have a right to speak out on energy efficiency issues in international debates.

With regard to an international approach, will the Minister say what the Government's attitude towards tradeable quotas will be? Are they regarded as a method of achieving a fair sharing of the burden of cutting carbon dioxide emissions among countries in general?

The special session of the United Nations will also provide an opportunity to continue the debate on the aviation fuel tax. Given, first, that the cost of aviation fuel in most countries is substantially below the cost of petrol used by cars; secondly, that carbon dioxide emissions per passenger mile travelled are mostly higher for air travel than for car travel, and that for short-haul air travel they are higher than for high-speed trains; and, thirdly, that air traffic is growing so fast that carbon dioxide emissions from this source rose by almost one third in the five years up to 1995, it seems extraordinary that aviation fuel is not already taxed.

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman says that it is extraordinary that aviation fuel is not taxed, but it would be extremely difficult to ensure that it was taxed by all countries. If only one country imposed it, airlines would probably refuel elsewhere.

Mr. Yeo: I take that point. I was about to say that I recognise the difficulties. Clearly, to be effective, a tax would have to be agreed internationally. I recognise the role that my right hon. Friend played in the previous

[Mr. Yeo]

Government in trying to promote the debate in the European Union and elsewhere. I welcome those efforts, but little practical achievement has yet been recorded. It is a matter of great urgency, for the reasons that I stated: the growth in air traffic and the relative inefficiency of air travel in terms of carbon dioxide emission. The matter requires greater attention.

No one could seriously argue that requiring the air travel industry to bear a share of the environmental costs that it imposes on the world would not be a desirable objective. It is also clear that the imposition of a tax on aviation fuel would be a powerful incentive for airlines to improve the energy efficiency of their aircraft. If air fares were raised as a result of such a tax, that might provide an incentive for people to consider alternatives such as high-speed trains, particularly for short-haul journeys.

I seek an assurance from the Minister that the Government accept the merits of the case for taxing aviation fuel, that they will strive for international agreement on that and that they will seize the opportunity to promote that debate at the special session in two weeks.

I acknowledge that I have touched on only a fraction of the issues that will be considered at the Earth summit, but, because of the level of interest in this debate, I did not wish to take up an unreasonable amount of time. I want to ensure that these issues are before the House, and I shall certainly want to return to them during this parliamentary Session. I should like to have touched on many other matters—forestry, water issues, biodiversity and on the crucial debate about how we can enable poorer countries to achieve their legitimate aspirations for greater prosperity without undermining the progress of the world as a whole towards sustainability.

I hope that some of those matters will be dealt with by other hon. Members. I want to leave time for that, but I hope that the Minister will respond to the specific points that I have made. If she cannot do so in her speech today—I realise that she will not have had notice of all of them and that there may not be time for her to deal with all of them—I hope that she will respond by letter, preferably before the start of the special session in two weeks.

There is growing interest in the subject. I am sure that the Government will want to be judged by their deeds rather than by their words. Actions and decisions, not more policy reviews, are needed to build on the work of the previous Government. Sustainable development is an issue which should transcend party political boundaries. Conservative Members are ready to support the Government when they are moving in the right direction, but we shall be relentless in exposing their failures.

11.14 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I shall endeavour to follow the unselfish example of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) and speak succinctly. Wednesday morning speeches, when colleagues want to speak, should be short.

My one question to my hon. Friend the Minister is about mahogany and her Department's policy towards it. On 3 June in *The Independent*, Nicholas Schoon made a comparison between 1972 and 1997. He wrote that in 1972 up to a third of the world's girdle of tropical rain forests had been destroyed, and about 0.5 per cent. of the remainder were being lost each year—some 100,000 sq km, or an area the size of Iceland.

Schoon stated that the deforestation rate for the tropics from 1990 to 1995 was estimated to be 130,000 sq km a year, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. It is thought that one or two plant and animal species become extinct every hour, as a result. The Brazilian national space academy estimated last year that the rate of deforestation in the Amazon had risen from 11,000 sq km to 15,000 sq km since the 1992 Earth summit.

I had the good fortune to go to the rally of the Amer-Indians at Altamira in Brazil in 1989 and subsequently to have had as my guests in the House the chiefs of the Kayopo tribe, Pyakan and Ru'uni. The all-party Latin-American group, of which I am a vice-chairman, has had relations with President Cardoso and the other South American leaders who attended the successful conference four months ago.

Against that background, may I ask the Minister and the Department about the Government's policy towards the importation of mahogany. It is no good imposing a blanket ban on imports. That would simply create resentment among countries that need to export. It is important to try to ascertain how the mahogany is harvested—whether that is done sensitively, without ruining the entire ecosystem, or by greedy developers who could not care less about the rain forest and simply sail in with their heavy machinery.

Members of Parliament who have had the good fortune to see those operations for themselves would testify that the importing countries can endeavour to do something constructive about the imports and their precise background. I should like to ask the Minister about mahogany cutting and the related question of the ecosystem.

11.17 am

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): I am delighted that the debate has been secured and by the number of hon. Members who want to participate, which shows the increasing interest in the topic of sustainable development. Clearly, there is an increasing understanding of sustainable development.

I shall concentrate on a number of specific issues—one might call them cross-sectoral issues—in relation to Earth summit 2. First, the European Union position paper refers to the importance of moving to the implementation phase of sustainable development. That implies that nothing much has happened since Rio, except in the development of the process. That is useful enough, and it is important that the show should be kept on the road. There have been real achievements in the process, but it is time to start talking about serious implementation.

The danger at the New York summit is that, far from moving towards implementation, the Rio process could fall apart. That danger springs from the fact that the basic agreement reached at Rio has not been honoured. That agreement was based on the principle that the north and the south have common but differentiated responsibilities regarding sustainable development. Therefore, the north undertook to transfer resources to the south, in terms of both funding and technology, to allow sustainable

development to occur in that area. The aim was development and improving the quality of life without devastating the environment in the process.

In reality, the north has cut its development aid to the south. The gap between what is needed and what is provided is grotesque. That issue cannot be bucked in New York. I am pleased by the new Government's approach to sustainable development generally. However, I was disappointed when the Prime Minister said during Prime Minister's questions last week that public expenditure limits would constrain the United Kingdom's ability to increase aid in the foreseeable future. That leads us to ask: what will the United Kingdom say in New York about that crucial issue which will decide the success of the summit?

It is important to support the idea of new financial mechanisms—one of which, the air fuel tax, was mentioned this morning. That seems a feasible option which would generate significant resources. If we cannot get our acts together on bilateral aid, there must be independent mechanisms to provide resources for sustainable development as of right. I believe that the United Kingdom Government should support the establishment of an intergovernmental panel on finance, which would report within a defined time scale and make a commitment to implement the panel's recommendations.

I also support the idea that the European Union should start the process by imposing its own air fuel tax. The system could be devised and the tax introduced immediately. That is one way of keeping the countries of the south on board and allowing the process to continue.

A second consideration is trade. It seems clear that the World Trade Organisation is not taking sustainability seriously. Its conventional wisdom is that free trade is inevitably good for sustainability, first, through the operation of the law of comparative advantage, which means that goods are produced in those areas best suited to that purpose—ignoring all sorts of other considerations that complicate the matter further—and, secondly, through the generation of increased wealth that can be used for environmental protection. That is old-fashioned, out-of-date conventional economic thinking, and it must be challenged seriously in New York.

In addition, the World Trade Organisation's rules often work against environmental protection and, on some occasions, have prevented countries from implementing important environmental protection measures. Therefore, I support the establishment of an intergovernmental panel on trade and environment. Non-governmental organisations must have greater access to, and input in, the WTO decision-making process. Although it is dangerous to call for the establishment of whole mechanisms, the current mechanisms are not working in these two areas and we must devise new ones.

Thirdly, the north must move towards sustainable consumption as a quid pro quo for calling on the south to forgo unsustainable development and consumption. Energy is just one aspect of that issue. Kyoto has been mentioned; it must be a success, and Earth summit 2 should pave the way for that.

I support the imposition of legally binding commitments on industrial countries to achieve a 20 per cent. reduction in the level of 1990 emissions by 2005. The United Kingdom Government are talking about achieving that target by 2010. That is a challenging target, and 2005 is even more so. However, I do not believe that it is beyond the wit of man to devise solutions at a time of crisis. Sustainable development is a challenge, and saving the planet is the most important challenge of all.

Tradeable quotas have been mentioned. There is nothing wrong with that idea in itself, but it raises the question of how quotas would be allocated in the first place. There is a great deal to be said for the contraction and convergence scenario suggested by the Aubrey Meyer Global Commons Institute. It aims to establish global equity and would provide a mechanism for transferring resources to developing countries. That allocation would occur on a per capita basis, and the extent of the contraction would be based not on what is supposedly realistic, but on what is necessary to prevent damaging climate change. Climate change is a deadly serious business. We should not suggest for one moment that it might not be that bad, that it has happened before and that it might have some advantages. When human activity destabilises the planet's climate, it is time to sit up and take notice.

The United Kingdom has set a target of reducing 1990 emissions by 20 per cent. by 2010. That target, however, will not be met unless we tackle the problem of road transport. I was delighted to hear the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, in addressing the United Nations Environment and Development Organisation, UK, conference at the Royal Geographical Society, make a commitment to the environment and to public transport within an integrated transport policy.

Turning to practicalities, I trust, therefore, that the Government will support the Road Traffic Reduction (UK Targets) Bill which I shall introduce in the new year. The debate on it will be at the heart of the discussions on transport and sustainable development in the run-up to the White Paper that the Government intend to publish in spring 1998. If the Government accept the legislation and begin the process of reducing the volume of road transport, they will set a very important example to the rest of the world and establish the United Kingdom in a lead position.

11.26 am

Mr. Dennis Murphy (Wansbeck): At the outset of my maiden speech, I thank the people of Wansbeck for allowing me to represent them in this House. It is indeed an honour and a privilege.

I was born in the constituency of Wansbeck and have lived in it all my life. I believe that I understand the problems of the area and I have never wished to represent any other constituency. My predecessor, Jack Thompson, represented Wansbeck for 14 years. He was a hard-working, diligent Member of Parliament who never forgot either his background or his roots. It is to his eternal credit that, whenever I speak of him in the House or outside, people refer to him as a genuinely nice man. Not many people can manage that delicate double of being well liked and an effective politician.

Another of my predecessors was Thomas Burt, Member of Parliament for Morpeth, who was elected to the House in 1874. He was a great man who served his people and this place with great distinction for 44 years. He was also the first miners' Member of Parliament. I mention that because the near closure of the mining industry means that I will probably be the last miners' Member of Parliament to represent my constituency.

[Mr. Dennis Murphy]

Wansbeck is situated north east of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, squeezed between Berwick-upon-Tweed and Blyth Valley—so it is a veritable rose. The main town of Ashington owes its existence to coal mining. It was the original company town, where the coal owners built and owned everything—including, for a time, the miners themselves. Apart from coal, Ashington is a famous footballing town. It is the home of Jackie Milburn, the famous—and, some would say, the very first—Newcastle United striker in the 1950s, and of Bobby and Jackie Charlton, who both had brilliant individual careers, culminating in their playing in the 1966 World cup final.

The constituency boasts two beautiful ancient market towns: Morpeth to the west, which is home to the Northumbrian pipes, and Bedlington to the south which, among other things, is famous for its breed of dog, the Bedlington terrier. It is completed to the east by the seaside village of Newbiggin, which operates one of the last fishing coble fleets in Britain.

In my view, the constituency is a microcosm of the industrial north. It is a classic example of the aftermath of colliery closures in a single-industry area.

Mining underpinned the local economies and the speed of the decline and ultimate demise of the area industry dealt an economic body blow from which the local authorities have not yet recovered.

Our people, however, have not sat back and whinged. They have worked in partnership with local government and the private sector to expand and broaden the base of the local economy. Much work has been done to clean up the environment, to rid ourselves of the legacy of 200 years of coal mining. Award-winning country parks and lakes have replaced slag heaps. High-tech business parks with global telecommunication links now stand on colliery sites. Two major employers in the constituency have invested heavily in environmental improvements.

Through skilled management and a dedicated work force, the Alcan aluminium smelter has weathered two recessions. The company is now investing heavily in the future in opening the new aluminium-producing pot line with state-of-the-art emission controls. The fact that the company is able to do so is a personal tribute to the managing director, Mr. Frank McGravie, who never gave up hope. When complete, the plant will provide 150 much needed new, permanent jobs.

Synpac is a local Taiwanese-owned company. It manufactures in Wansbeck 10 per cent. of the world's supply of penicillin G. It has invested in new plant to turn effluent into high protein animal feedstock. We should applaud those industries that invest to protect our planet.

Also in the constituency is a unique project called Earth Balance. As the name implies, the project works in harmony with the environment. We have on site an organic farm and an organic bakery. In keeping with the finest traditions of the north-east, we also have an organic brewery. Electricity is produced on site by wind and hydro power, with solar energy also available. It is a community-based sustainable development and we are justly proud of it.

Air quality and the physical environment are clearly important and so, too, is our quality of life. Being in employment improves our quality of life. We have had many successes recently in the area in attracting new jobs to it, but, in reality, we have hardly scratched the surface. There are unemployment rates of more than 30 per cent. in some wards.

For the first time, I am meeting third generation unemployed people. Who do these young people look to for an example? Who is at home to teach them the value and discipline of work? Who is there in the morning at six o'clock each and every day to get them out to work? Who is there in the evenings at the dinner table to share their day's experiences and to encourage them after an especially bad day? Sadly, many of these young people have no one to fill those roles. I am pleased, therefore, that it is one of the Government's priorities to offer hope and place an investment in the future of 250,000 young people. I hope that the training will be both relevant and wide ranging and in some way will compensate for disadvantaged backgrounds.

I was made redundant three years ago. I was fortunate because, within a few weeks, I regained employment. I did, however, sign on the dole along with many colleagues with whom I had worked for more than 25 years. Part of the team with which I worked signed on with me, including three highly skilled miners. They were proud, hard-working, diligent men, who genuinely contributed a great deal to society. They signed on as unskilled. They are still out of work. What a terrible human waste.

I am pleased to sit on the Government Benches, albeit a very long way from the Government Front Bench. I am delighted to support policies that harness the skills and talents of the people of this great nation.

11.35 am

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I send a warm welcome to the new hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) and congratulate him on his maiden speech. He gave the House a thorough tour of his constituency. I am sure that he will return to the important theme of unemployment in his constituency and the need to look forward to developing the future. That ties in with the wider issue of sustainable development because we cannot unlink the environment from social and economic sustainability.

I congratulate the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on securing the debate and allowing the House the opportunity to discuss some of the key issues to be raised by Earth summit 2. The first so-called Earth summit took place almost five years ago in Rio. It was the most significant meeting held by the United Nations on sustainable development. The challenge is to ensure that the global desire for a more sustainable existence, so clearly expressed at Rio, maintains its momentum.

Much has already been achieved, but there is a great deal still to do and Britain needs to be setting the lead. The Government have stated that they want to put the environment at the heart of their administration, so they must work to put the environment at the heart of international negotiations. They must also ensure that the United Kingdom has a leading role in those negotiations.

The most pressing environmental challenge that we all face has already been taken up in the debate. The framework convention on climate change looks set to agree binding greenhouse gas emission targets at the Kyoto meeting on climate change in December. I have no

doubt that that should be seen as a concrete achievement in international regime building. I look forward also to the Government's climate change action plan. The new Government have set themselves a welcome and ambitious target for reducing carbon dioxide emissions, the main greenhouse gas, and they will require imaginative solutions for their targets to be met.

I would welcome an assurance from the Minister on comments reported in *The Independent* on 5 June, which were attributed to the new Green Minister. The article states that

"the Environment minister told the conference Britain would not deliver on its new target of cutting carbon dioxide emissions by 20% by 2010 if other European Union nations did not go further in curbing greenhouse gas emissions."

If we believe that the climate change threat is real—I think we all accept that it—it would be wrong to refuse to take action ourselves simply because other countries would be slow to follow our lead. Is the Minister able to assure us that the report in *The Independent* is inaccurate, and that the Government will press ahead with meeting their election commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent., irrespective of whether other EU countries go further, although maintaining pressure on them to do so? The best pressure to bring to bear will be that of showing a lead.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will the hon. Gentleman add to his question the very tough supplementary that if other nations are seriously to follow us, we must show them in advance precisely how we are to achieve our targets? If we fail to do that, they will not believe in the targets and we shall be worse than useless as a leader in international negotiations.

Mr. Taylor: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I hope that the Government will give the House the opportunity, in Government time, fully to debate the actions that they propose. I hope that they will outline in detail how they plan to achieve their objectives, not merely state their objectives. There is a great gap between the will and the how, which has not been properly outlined.

The special session must provide the momentum for the Kyoto conference and remove blockages for negotiation so that legally binding targets can be agreed by industrial countries for the short term. I should also like to see an evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures that have so far been taken on all greenhouse gases. If we cannot identify where we have succeeded and where we have failed, it will be difficult to meet the tougher targets that will be necessary to prevent a serious threat to human life.

Other agreements at Rio, such as the convention on biological diversity, have failed to achieve the same focus, and there has been little progress in implementing or funding the desertification convention. Once species and habitats are lost, they are gone for good. Too many have already been lost. Urgent action is needed to ensure that a comprehensive and effective global biodiversity plan is in place, so all countries should be urged to ratify the convention on biological diversity and should work to produce national and international strategies to conserve biodiversity.

Crucially, neither the framework convention on climate change nor the convention on biological diversity has agreed a programme of action or mobilised sufficient financial resources to implement their aims in developing countries. As a result, their financial mechanism—the global environment facility—has been left largely without any clear strategic direction.

The greatest and potentially most intractable challenge has been financing our commitments to achieving environmental sustainability. In fact, the GEF budget amounted to under 0.004 per cent. of gross domestic product in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—about 50p per person per year in the UK. The UK should commit itself—I hope that the Minister can give some indication on this—to increasing its contribution to the GEF, and work to ensure that GEF activities are properly monitored.

We should also increase the proportion of our bilateral aid devoted to biodiversity. At the moment, it is just 1 per cent., which is far smaller than our major partners' allocations. We should show our international colleagues that we are serious about looking after our environment and encourage others to follow suit.

How we finance our international environmental commitments is likely to be at the centre of debate at next month's special session and is, I believe, fundamental to its success. Poverty around the globe is on the increase and, what is more, the disparity between rich and poor is growing. The need of developing countries for funds is at least as great now as it was in 1992. Since Rio, forests have continued to be cleared, wetlands have been substantially destroyed and the Earth's biodiversity further eroded. In many cases—most cases, probably—that is not through deliberate or wilful neglect, but because many developing countries simply do not have the resources to pursue more sustainable forms of development or to police effectively rules designed to protect the environment. One cannot tell a hungry family that they must stay hungry for the sake of protecting the global environment.

The developed countries have simply not fulfilled their commitments made at Rio to provide new and additional resources. Official development assistance fell from a peak of $62 billion in 1992 to around $53 billion in 1995, far outweighing the $3 billion in the GEF since 1992.

It is imperative for all our futures that poorer developing countries remain committed to the ambitious agenda and targets of Rio. If they are to do so, developed countries such as ours have to demonstrate at the United Nations special session that we are prepared to live up to the financial promises that we made, and that means ensuring that adequate financial resources are made available.

The UK Government can take a lead, ensuring that developed countries meet their aid targets of 0.7 per cent. of gross national product within 10 years. The UK does not meet that target at present, and in past years our commitment has fallen. Those cuts should be reversed, and I hope that the Government can announce a clear timetable for doing so. Without such a timetable, any vague promises are pretty much meaningless and certainly will not be believed in the developing world, which has bitter experience of what has gone on so far.

At the same time, the quality of aid must be improved. Although some progress has been made, too often aid continues to focus on large technology intensive projects rather than smaller sensitively planned projects that will yield environmental and social benefits. That is not good

[Mr. Taylor]

news for those countries, and it is not good news for global sustainability. Although some things that Britain has done on this front have been good, much is poor.

We simply cannot separate environmental sustainability from economic sustainability or social sustainability. Working to eradicate global poverty must be high on the Government's agenda. It will be impossible to do so without looking closely at global trading arrangements. International trading organisation are still weighted heavily against environmental sustainability. We need reforms to the global trading regime. Multilateral environmental treaties, like the climate change convention, should no longer be open to endless challenge under World Trade Organisation rules. We also need, alongside environmental reforms to WTO rules, to make real progress on the development of sustainability indicators. The Government have gone some way on that, but, internationally—particularly with the OECD—there is still an awfully long way to go.

It will have taken eight years simply to begin to measure the problems defined at Rio. I hope that the Minister will assure the House that work on this will be done as a matter of urgency.If we can achieve all of this, I hope that Earth summit 2 will go down in history as much as Rio has already, this time not as the beginning of change, but as the moment when the world showed that, it has not just woken up to a problem but can take the tough decisions that will do something about it.

11.48 am

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke–on–Trent, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on initiating the debate. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy), whose constituency I have visited. I look forward to working with him in this Parliament to ensure that we have a Parliament that addresses environmental issues.

When the Government go to New York to Earth summit 2, it is crucial that our delegates know that they have the whole-hearted support of the House in the very important work that needs to be done.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Under–Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions to her new post.

It is crucial that we build a cross-party alliance on green issues. Indeed, it seems to be growing. We have seen many changes already in this new Parliament: the majority that we now have on the Government Benches and the large influx of women into our Parliament. However, if our Parliament is truly to address the needs of the next millennium, we need to nurture the cross-party alliance on green issues, on issues of environmental sustainability. In fact, it was the hon. Member for South Suffolk, on the Opposition Benches, who initiated the debate, although many others have also tried. We need to work in partnership.

Just as we need to work in partnership with our Government delegates who are going to New York, so we need to work in partnership with all those throughout the country who are working on Agenda 21 issues, and who are working to get the message across locally and internationally—bottom up and top down. I make those comments as the vice-president of the Socialist Environmental Research Association. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley), who wishes to make her maiden speech shortly, shares the same sentiments. I want to ensure that we grasp this opportunity.

Our Prime Minister, our Deputy Prime Minister and other members of the Government are going out to New York shortly. I want them not just to seize the leadership of this debate in terms of the British Parliament but to deal with the issue on the world stage. We must seize the green mantle, because time is running out, just as time is running out for us in this debate—a debate which will give our Prime Minister greater authority when he goes out to make environmental points. We have a wonderful opportunity to assume that leadership.

The United Nations has made great progress, but, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) pointed out, we have not seen the progress that we want to see on the world stage. That is not the fault of any one person or Government; it is our failure to negotiate the international agreements that are needed and to tackle the environmental agenda with the urgency and priority that are needed. We need to say not only what we want, what we really really want, but how we will put it into practice.

That is why I want the Government to find a way in New York of overcoming the failure so far of the climate change convention to promote energy saving. That is why I want us to press for change within the global trading system. Despite all the UN's work, it still has not got it right. The trade and environment committee of the World Trade Organisation has not yet reconciled protection of the environment with global trading. We must develop a sustainable global trade regime and Earth summit 2 in New York is our best opportunity and challenge yet to do that. For example, the GATT treaty should be amended to confirm that the multilateral environmental treaties, such as the climate change convention, the biodiversity convention, the Montreal protocol, the Basel convention and the convention on international trade in endangered species, should all be exempt from challenge under GATT.

When my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary comes to consider section 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, I hope that she will study the recommendations that have been made and do what she can to speed up the process of addressing biodiversity issues. I cannot miss this opportunity to mention the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species conference which is taking place in Zimbabwe at the moment, of which the basking sharks issue is part and parcel.

That brings me to how we seize the green mantle. To do that, we must put our own house in order. Time is short and I do not have time to go through all the issues that I would like to raise which cut across every Department, from the Foreign Office and the Treasury to International Development, from the Environment to Transport, and so on. I commend to my hon. Friend a document produced by the Council for the Protection of Rural England in conjunction with the Green Alliance which has had an input from many groups with which we should be working in partnership, entitled "Have We Put Our Own House in Order?" That provides a starting point for not just debate but the actions and strategies that we now need to be preparing which will cut across and transcend the work of not just Government Departments but local government and local authorities, which in turn

links to the international and European agreements in which the Government, on behalf of all Parliaments of all people concerned about environmental issues, will take part.

I was a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry and I have taken part in debates on the regulation of the energy industry and the liberalisation of energy markets. I know that other Select Committees have considered other aspects. When we have the White Paper on the environment and when the Government's strategies on environmental sustainability are up and running, it is crucial that the Government, perhaps with the Procedure Committee, consider the way in which Select Committees work, so that environmental issues are at the heart of all Government policies, and consider how we will charge ourselves with ensuring that we contribute to what the Government do while ensuring that our house is in order.

I recently met a delegation from an organisation called Gender 21. In the Agenda 21 debate, women have been classified as a vulnerable group in terms of putting forward proposals on how women can take part in the environmental debate. I urge my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to ensure that the Government's civil service delegates who will be batting for us in New York meet representatives from Gender 21 to ensure that women's issues are firmly taken up and that great heed is taken of them at the New York summit.

I wondered how to put across the need to put environmental sustainability on our agenda. I should like to think that when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor presents his Budget shortly that will also be at the top of his agenda. I appreciate that things cannot change overnight and that it will take time, but I want us to move towards green taxes. Perhaps it is time to replace the Chancellor's Budget box with a rucksack made of recyclable, long-wearing material, which he could put on his back when he cycles from No. 11 to the House of Commons to make his Budget speech. I hope that, by the end of this Parliament, green taxes will be firmly at the heart of Government policy.

11.54 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I welcome the debate, although it is unfortunate that we have only one and a half hours. I hope that before future major international environmental conferences, such as the one in New York, we can have three-hour debates so that the Government and the delegation understand the feeling of hon. Members.

Like many hon. Members, I welcome the Government's strong commitment to the environment in their opening statements, the appointment of Ministers with responsibility for the environment and the strong delegation that will go to New York next week.

The Rio summit some years ago was an incredibly important turning point, because it was the culmination of many years of environmental campaigning by many people. Lots of wondrous statements were made and great commitments enunciated by Governments, but global warming continues, as does the destruction of the planet's forests and many of its species.

One of the key opportunities that will come in New York will be a proposal for a much tougher UN agency with powers to control and enforce limits on carbon emissions and many other gases that lead to global warming. Unless we are prepared to take the necessary steps to control emissions and environmental destruction, we will simply have a series of Earth summits every five years or so which will wring their hands about the on-going problems of environmental destruction, but have little power to do anything about them.

Some tough decisions lie ahead for the Government. I hope that they will maintain their commitment by ending the road-building programme, limiting the use of the motor car and increasing the use of public transport. In addition, some serious questions will be raised about the use of market mechanisms in solving environmental problems. Parallel to the Rio summit was the closure of the UN office on multinational companies and the establishment of the World Trade Organisation which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke–on–Trent, North (Ms Walley) said, has not come to terms with its environmental concerns. Instead, it is promoting free trade and the movement of goods around the world, which is at odds with protecting the environment.

For example, it is the height of madness to have undernourished people in many countries in Africa working extremely hard to produce early vegetables which are then flown by jet plane to London, Berlin, Paris and New York so that we can all enjoy them, while at the same time a set-aside policy leads to the non-use of available agricultural land in Britain and other parts of western Europe. The question of food miles is a serious one. If a taxation system on aircraft fuel leads to less of that nonsense, that will be welcome.

The climate change issue will dominate the summit. The first four months of this year have shown that the global average temperature is 0.37 deg C above the average global temperature between 1951 and 1980. We are at the point when the planet's global temperature is likely to be the highest ever for 100,000 years. Those who say that global warming is not serious or important because it is all part of a cycle of climate change are seriously missing the point. Clearly, there are cycles in global temperature, with warming and cooling, and there have been ice ages, and so on; but anyone considering the matter would say that the rate of extraction and burning of fossil fuels and the waste of such fuels with the most inefficient transport system possible—the endless use of the private motor car—must be a major contributory factor to global warming. We must act seriously.

I am alarmed when I read excellent publications such as that of the Global Commons Institute which has shown in graphic terms the extent of the use of fossil fuel and the potential for saving it, and the amount of money being put by mainly American oil giants into producing bogus, nonsensical reports which claim that oil exploration has no effect while, at the same time, those companies try to gain oil exploration licences throughout the Atlantic. We have to call a halt. We must protect the planet and the environment, but we cannot do that if, at the same time, we increase the rate of burning and exploitation of fossil fuels.

We must recognise that it is a question not just of Governments laying down the law to people but of harnessing the wishes of people around the planet for environmental protection and for survival. I often think of Chico Mendes, who lost his life in Brazil because he attempted to defend the rain forest. I think of people around the world who try to defend their environment. Those people are often fighting the very forces that fund

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

bogus institutes such as multinational oil companies. We will read much more about green guerrillas in the next five to 10 years. People in Latin America are trying to protect their land against oil exploration, just as people in the industrial north are trying to protect their environment.

One of the good outcomes of the Rio summit was the promotion of local Agenda 21 groups. I have the privilege of being the chair of the Islington Agenda 21 group, and I am always amazed at the energy that so many people put into producing very valuable reports on these matters.

Mr. Anthony Colman (Putney): Does my hon. Friend agree with and support the views of local government world wide that the United Nations General Assembly special session should take two actions? First, it should adopt global targets for local Agenda 21, as only 20 national Governments, including our own, have gone ahead with national programmes. Secondly, before the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1998, it should set up a study to investigate the barriers to local sustainable development that are created by central Governments.

Mr. Corbyn: I strongly endorse my hon. Friend's two points, and I pay tribute to his work in promoting Agenda 21 across London.

Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary give us a commitment that the Government will seriously consider harnessing all the good work of local Agenda 21 groups around the country to give them a regional and national focus, and providing those groups with the funding necessary to enable them to continue the valuable work that has been achieved thus far?

The debate is too short: the issue is far too big to be dealt with in this way. I hope that the House will return to this subject straight after the New York summit, ahead of the Kyoto conference.

12.1 pm

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech during this important debate. As an executive member of the Socialist Environmental Research Association, and, as the new Member for Stourbridge in the west midlands, I am keen to highlight for my constituents the important link between global initiatives, which we have discussed today, and the environment that they experience daily.

Stourbridge is an attractive and once thriving town. It is completely encircled by a busy ring road, which many people believe blights its regenerative potential. Roads throughout the constituency are choked with traffic fumes. The area is characterised by urban villages, such as the black country communities of Lye, Cradley and Quarry Bank. They are proud communities with a strong sense of industrial heritage and a strong work ethos, and I am proud to represent them.

Nowhere is the work ethos more apparent than in our schools, where teachers work hard to provide a high standard of excellence. I recognise and value their contribution. Throughout the constituency, teachers are well supported by not only parents, who recognise that we have a good education service from Dudley council, but an army of behind-the-scenes staff—caretakers, dinner ladies and secretaries—who all care very much about our children's well-being.

As a candidate, I stood outside school gates giving out leaflets to parents. I was approached time and again by lollipop ladies who told me about traffic pollution. They care about children's health, and they want me to do something about it. They care about the traffic fumes that the children breathe in every day.

Many schools in my constituency are situated on busy roads. Children breathe in polluted air on the way to school, in their classrooms and in the playgrounds. One in seven children suffer from asthma: the figure is one in five if they live near a major road. Earth summit 2, which reviews Agenda 21, is, therefore, important to the lollipop ladies of Stourbridge. I welcome the Government's commitment to cut carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. on 1990 levels by 2010: that is a welcome start to deal with a difficult problem.

Pensioners in Stourbridge are also affected by the summit. Like pensioners across the country, they often survive on pitifully small incomes, and often have to struggle to heat homes. Local Agenda 21 can touch their lives: insulating homes, saving fuel and lowering bills would substantially affect the quality of their lives.

Young people can also gain from the summit through local jobs created by environmental initiatives. I am pleased to say that, in my constituency, a new cycle path has just this week been created along a canal tow path. The canal is a major and much-loved recreational facility enjoyed by anglers, walkers, families and now cyclists. Our new environmental task forces can open up more facilities, rejuvenate our parks and turn some of our neglected and vandalised cemeteries into wildlife havens. Plenty can be done at local level to improve our environment, and plenty can be done by government at national and international level.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Churches of Stourbridge. Through public meetings, they have raised issues of global environment. Congregations in Wollaston, Amblecote, Pedmore and Norton have discussed the vital issues of sustainable development, such as forestry, drinking water, fish stocks, as well as energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. I sincerely hope that Britain will take a lead on those matters during Earth summit 2, and will make them a high priority.

Earth summit 2, which focuses on sustainable development, should also set a target for the climate change convention to be held in Kyoto later this year. To bring about change we must have vision, and we must have action. I have a vision of a renaissance for my constituency, and it is now a real possibility. Proposals include the pedestrianisation of Stourbridge town centre, the opening of more pathways and cycle routes, creation of new jobs, rejuvenation of open spaces and investment in urban industrial architecture and heritage.

We already have plenty of good things in Stourbridge: most notably food and drink. Many people who come to the black country for the first time remark on our excellent, small, local pubs. Well, that is not surprising, as the local brew is the best.

It is tradition in a maiden speech to make positive comments about one's predecessor. He did two things well: he held regular constituency surgeries—I give him

full credit for that, because it is important for Members of Parliament to do so—and, I am told, he was a keen customer of the excellent balti restaurants in Lye. I shall be only too happy to carry on his good work.

I shall conclude on a serious note. It is easy for some people to dismiss far-away conferences on global issues as "nothing to do with me". I hope that I have shown that it is in all our interests to take urgent action. The quality of our environment is rapidly deteriorating, and the very real concerns raised by the lollipop ladies of Stourbridge are the same concerns for which solutions must be found at Earth summit 2.

12.7 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I congratulate the hon. Members for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) and for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) on their maiden speeches. They both showed great knowledge of their constituencies, and brought the importance of the global issues with which Earth summit 2 will be concerned into local focus. That is essential if we are to make the great issues of climate change and biodiversity real to all our population, which is crucial.

I thank the hon. Member for Stoke–on–Trent, North (Ms Walley) for her comments. She said that there should be a bipartisan approach to these issues. I thank the Under–Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), and her right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for their kind comments about the environmental steps taken by the previous Government in general and by me in particular. I assure the hon. Lady that the Opposition will support the Government in every way possible to promote our joint environmental ends.

I cannot resist reminding the Under-Secretary from time to time that it would have been nice to have that bipartisan approach, for which I sought hard, when we were in power. However, I shall remind her of that only occasionally, winsomely, when I wish to do so. On the other hand, I must tell the hon. Lady that I shall press her—and, I am sure she will be pleased to hear, her colleagues in other Departments—to provide the "how" for the "what" that we share. She must therefore take it as helpful, rather than as in any way destructive of her position, if I constantly press members of the Government to tell us what they are doing to make a reality of the targets that have now been set out.

It is well known that we signed up to the target of a 15 per cent. reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the European Union and that, for 10 per cent., it was clearly worked out how that reduction would be achieved, country by country. I have always felt that it would be difficult to provide an equally accurate statement of how we could achieve a 20 per cent. reduction in CO_2 emissions, which is a tough target.

The Government have accepted the target and I shall support them in reaching it, but they really must say how they intend to do so. I shall give three examples of the sort of "how" that we shall need. First, we shall need an assessment of what extra will have to be done to make up for the changes in taxation proposed by the Government. I shall not argue about those changes. I simply say that changes are proposed, that if they take place they will have an effect and that we shall have to estimate what that effect will be. We want to know precisely what steps will be taken to replace what is lost.

Secondly, the House will not put up with arguments that simply say, "We shall do a lot more about energy efficiency." No one could be more enthusiastic about energy efficiency than I am, but an example of one of the problems is that, as we all know, if we insulate the home of a pensioner, energy savings may not result; instead, the home may become warmer. People may spend the same amount of money, while living in conditions that they feel are more comfortable. It is not for us to say whether that judgment is right, but we must properly assess the real effect of such measures on emissions, and I submit that we have not yet done so. We shall press the Government on that subject.

Thirdly, among the details that we shall have to pin down are the rather frightening proposals that the non-fossil fuel obligation should, rather curiously, be spread to fossil fuels. In both logical and linguistic terms, I find that difficult to understand. The Government have made a commitment that so-called "clean coal" will be subsidised, but the House knows that "clean coal" is not clean; it is one of those fake phrases. "Clean" coal may be less dirty in terms of sulphur, but it is no less dirty in terms of CO_2 emissions. The idea that we should increase the amount of power that we generate using that dirty coal, pretending that it is clean, and without understanding what we are doing, runs wholly contrary to the Government's policies. I do not say that because I wish to score points in any sense. I want to win for us all. I want to win for the Department of the Environment against those who do not have the same things at heart.

That leads me to my next main point. We need not only a tough bipartisan approach, pressing all the time, but the kind of personal commitment that alone will carry such changes through, not only in government here but in the European Union and beyond. That being so, we must recognise that climate change is a reality, and we must be more than missionary in demanding the alterations in our life style that alone will meet the challenges involved.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) attacked all the international oil companies, because there are some remarkably good ones that are taking the matter seriously. We should distinguish between those that are trying, and those that are still manifestly wrongly supporting the American coal industry in their antagonism to the science.

I shall continue my battle to insist that aviation fuel should be taxed in Europe as a whole. I sought to bring that about when I was Secretary of State for the Environment. We have to start in Europe. The Under-Secretary will find that we have to start everything there; the European Union is crucial to the future of the environment.

No country can do on its own what needs to be done. We produce only 3 per cent. of the overall pollution, so the European Union has to deal with the whole subject, and set an example, because the Americans are way behind. Our actions within the EU are therefore crucial.

The Under-Secretary will also find that she has to do something about the United States. It takes the work of 120 people to provide the energy that each American uses, whereas it takes the work of 60 people to provide the energy that each European uses, the work of eight people for the energy that each Chinaman uses, and the work of one person for the energy that each Bangladeshi uses. That tells us a great deal about who grabs most and who wastes most.

[Mr. John Gummer]

The fact that the United States cannot meet even the meagre targets that the EU has set, although it uses twice as much energy as we do, and certainly does not have a standard of living twice as high as ours, shows how wasteful the Americans are. Anyone who has visited the United States knows what that means. One has to put one's coat on in the summer because the air conditioning is so high, and take it off in the winter because the heating is so high. We must raise such issues, so I thank the House for allowing my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) to raise the matter in a short debate.

We are talking not only about the future of our children and grandchildren—although, goodness knows, that is important enough—but about the future of the planet, and about making it possible for people to live on it at all.

That is why I must tell the Under-Secretary that this debate is not good enough as a forum for discussion before the Earth summit. The Government should have introduced a full day's debate. I do not blame them, because it would have been difficult to arrange that so soon after the election, but I ask the hon. Lady to find out whether we can debate the subject again immediately after the summit.

Mr. Bennett *rose—*

Mr. Gummer: I have only a very short time, because I have promised to finish speaking soon.

It would be good to have a full debate, and I should like it to be in the middle of the week, so that some of our colleagues on both sides of the House, who do not understand how serious things are, may wander in and realise the importance of the subjects that we are discussing. I hope that that will be possible.

I hope that the Under-Secretary will recognise that we must learn not only to live differently ourselves, but to live differently in the world as a whole. The concept of global commons is vital, so long as it really is global and really is commons. If we ask people to accept the importance of intellectual property, we must also ask people in the west to accept the idea that we should pay for the basic materials that we use that come from the biodiversity of the world, and are in the ownership of some of the poorest nations, which do not now get much back for them.

That is a kind of parallelism; it is a question of paying. We have earned what we have by pollution. Our pollution has provided us with riches, so we have an enormous responsibility to help those on whom we now rely to save the planet. The north-south divide, and the north-south dialogue, will be crucial when we come to those negotiations.

I do not have time to do more than refer briefly to two important matters. What my hon. Friends and others have said about the World Trade Organisation is right. If we want the financial advantages of free trade, we must demand the moral advantages of world responsibility in trade. We cannot grab for ourselves merely the money that comes from trade, without recognising that that in turn demands a payment—a moral payment—and a responsibility throughout the world.

Lastly, I shall challenge the Under-Secretary on one of the most difficult subjects of all. Yet another meeting about fishing is to take place in the House, and I know that many Members from both sides of the House will be holding forth there about fishing. However, they will not be holding forth about the fact that every fishery ground in the world is over-fished, and that Britain over-fishes just as every other country in the European Union does, so we need to do something about over-fishing, or there will be no fish left.

We need to achieve those ends, and I ask the hon. Lady to admit that some tough measures therefore have to be taken. She will have the support of the Opposition, but it will be the kind of probing support that will ensure that the measures taken live up to the targets that she, properly, has placed before us.

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): I congratulate the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on initiating this debate, although I feel somewhat daunted in attempting to answer in 10 minutes the many questions on global and interrelated issues raised in the debate. I hope that the House will bear in mind the time constraints, and I will try to deal as best I can with the issues raised.

The new Government have put sustainable development at the heart of policy making at home and abroad, and this is apparent from the responsibilities of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in bringing together the issues of the environment, transport and the regions. We also recognise that there are other cross-departmental issues that tie in directly with sustainability issues across government. My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary, in his mission statement for the Foreign Office, and the Secretary of State for International Development have also given a completely new focus to their Departments' approach to sustainable development, which will help in our negotiations.

In the short time since taking office, we have made clear our determination to make faster progress than our predecessors. I welcome the support given by Opposition Members today and I look forward to their probing, as they check that we are planning to meet what we all admit are extremely tough targets. We must meet those targets if we are to protect the future of our planet.

I wish to deal with some of the issues raised in the debate, but, first, I want to congratulate the two maiden speakers who demonstrated once again the high standard of maiden speeches being enjoyed by the House—a record number. My hon. Friends the Members for Wansbeck (Mr. Murphy) and for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) demonstrated their abilities and their concern for their constituents. I am sure that we all look forward to more high-quality speeches from my hon. Friends.

On aviation tax, I am happy to say that the Government believe that we have to tax aviation fuel and we will support the Dutch presidency's attempt to have a look at whether we can do this on a European Union basis only. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Suffolk will appreciate that we have to get international agreement on this important issue; otherwise there is the risk of perverse incentives applying. The Government will continue to press on that issue.

Another important issue raised in the debate is the relationship between the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the World Trade Organisation on

environmental agreements, and the fact that there is often tension between the two. The Government are well aware of the position and believe that international environmental conventions must be exempt from challenge by GATT and the WTO if they are to mean anything—be it the Montreal convention, the Basel convention or the convention on international trade in endangered species, which is currently subject to some trade threats with respect to leg-hold traps.

It is no good the world community putting together important conventions on environmental issues, implying real sacrifices and tough decisions, if they can have holes punched through them by the WTO or GATT. In New York, we will look to ensure that we reach agreement on exempting such conventions; otherwise, the problem is that, the more effective the convention, the more likely it is be to have holes punched in it by GATT in an attempt to dismantle it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) raised the extremely important issue of mahogany. As one of the major importers of mahogany, the United Kingdom must continue to work with the producer countries. We agree with my hon. Friend that a ban would be wrong, but we must either unilaterally or internationally reach agreements to prevent the wanton destruction of these very important resources. He can rest assured that we will try to make progress on the issue, which we realise is extremely complex.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk asked what the Government's energy efficiency targets were, and I can confirm that we are seeking a 20 per cent. reduction in energy use in Government buildings by the year 2000. My experience of the new Eland house office block—which is environmentally sound—is that we have had three floods there in two weeks. We could do with it being drier, although that block is good for the climate and for energy efficiency.

The Government have announced our determination to reverse the downward trend of aid from 0.27 per cent.—where it currently rests—up to 0.7 per cent. of gross national product, and a White Paper on development will deal with the issue. I hope that the White Paper will deal with the quality, as well as the quantity, of aid. The Department of the Environment is reviewing the national sustainable development strategy. We have announced new and more stringent targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. We also propose that the House establish a new Select Committee to consider the environmental effects of policies and actions across the whole of government. We hope that that will allow the legislature to give an extra push to our commitment to green the whole of government.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: Before the Under-Secretary moves on from the issue of targets—I welcome the establishment of a Committee, but that is another matter—I wish to ask her a question. It has been reported that the Government have said that their 20 per cent. carbon dioxide target was dependent on action by other European countries. Can she clarify whether that was correct?

Angela Eagle: My understanding is that, regardless of what other countries do, we are not going to offer completely unilateral targets. We hope that what we do will put pressure at Kyoto on others to come up with equally binding targets, which we hope they will deliver. We are committed to our 20 per cent. target.

In a change of emphasis from the previous Government, we believe that progress on sustainable development—so vital to the future of our planet—depends on issues of social equity and poverty eradication, which require unequivocal leadership from the developed world. From that point of view, I commend almost all the speech of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Dafis) who is a well-known expert on the matter and is going to UNGASS in one of his other guises with my hon. Friends the Members for Putney (Mr. Colman) and for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley).

We believe that poverty reduction is one of the key areas that has been neglected in the process. The first principle of the Rio declaration states that human beings are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. We recognise that; but, in the developing world, 500,000 women die each year in childbirth and 160 million children are malnourished. One quarter of the world's people remain in severe poverty, although it is estimated that the cost of eradicating poverty is a mere 1 per cent. of global income.

We believe that this problem must be tackled if we are to make progress towards a more environmentally sustainable world and we want to put more emphasis on that. We accept that there are difficulties between north and south in this respect and we want to play our part as a Government in putting them right so that we can then take the Earth summit 2 process forward more successfully. We strongly support the plans outlined in the OECD development assistance committee report, which says that the world should set itself targets—including that of halving world poverty—and should reverse the downward trend in natural resource degradation by 2015. We shall push for agreement on this at the special session.

All donor countries should work in partnership with developing countries to achieve measurable progress. After all, it is the poor, not the rich, who are the first to suffer when the environment is damaged. To realise the truth, we have only to think about the way in which rising sea levels could affect coastal communities in some of the poorest parts of Asia, or about subsistence farmers struggling to grow their crops in degraded soil. The Government believe that we need to integrate poverty reduction and environmental protection into mainstream economic and development policies. We need to make the most of opportunities to reduce poverty, and protect the environment at the same time.

There are many issues that I have been unable even to touch on in this all-too-brief debate, such as climate change, forests, oceans, fish stocks and fresh water. I hope that this is the first of many debates on those important matters. I look forward to working with hon. Members of all parties to make progress.

We have a strong team of Ministers going to the United Nations sessions, which shows the Government's commitment in this extremely important area. The team will be led by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and will include my right hon. Friends the Deputy Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for International Development and the Minister for the Environment.

Residential Care (Cornwall)

12.30 pm

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring to the attention of the House a problem that affects hundreds of people in my constituency and throughout Cornwall.

Before dealing with the problems of long-term care for the elderly in Cornwall, I should like, in my maiden speech, to describe my constituency. It is the penultimate seat before the Atlantic and America, a place of almost indescribable beauty, stretching from Gwithian to Portreath on the north coast, while the Carrick roads and Helford river form its southerly boundaries.

The north coast is wild and the south coast is bathed in warm air that gives us some of the world's most famous and breathtaking gardens—Trebah being one which readily comes to mind. We have creeks and coves, windswept cliffs and sun-soaked and glorious beaches, but that beauty, like so much in life, cannot mask the underlying problems that scar the area.

Unemployment is at 10 per cent. officially, yet, on estates in Redruth and Camborne, it is nearer 90 per cent. among men of working age. The old industries, such as mining, quarrying, fishing and farming, are in decline and what work there is, is often low paid and seasonal, in the tourist industry.

The last working tin mine in Europe provides a mainstay of employment in the north of the constituency, as do the Falmouth docks in the south, but where thousands were employed years ago, only handfuls of hundreds are today. Many more jobs used to be found in the tin and quarrying industries and still more depended on the mines.

Today, we have the internationally famous Camborne school of mines that has trained hundreds of people from throughout the world in its many arts. There is widespread dismay in the area because the welcome plan for a university for Cornwall in Penzance includes the proposal to relocate that famous school out of our area.

Before making this speech, I read my predecessors' maiden speeches. The last four all referred to problems of unemployment. Sebastian Coe, the former Olympic runner, spoke of the endemic unemployment, as did his predecessors, the broadcaster David Mudd, Dr. Dunwoody and Frank Harold Hayman. Senior Members may remember Harold Hayman, a Labour Member of Parliament who is still spoken of with love and affection by my constituents. "If you do half as well as our Harold," they tell me, "you won't be doing half bad."

My priority as a Member of Parliament will be to bring new work and opportunities to my constituents. I look forward with relish to the introduction of a national minimum wage which, alongside reform of our benefits system, will enable my constituents to enjoy employment and a living wage.

I shall be keen to ensure that we have a development agency to tackle the problems facing the fishing and farming communities, improve the quality of our housing and provide new opportunities for our young people through jobs and training. In Cornwall, we are concerned to ensure that the seasonal nature of much of our employment does not result in fewer opportunities for our young people and the long-term unemployed. The number of people enduring long-term unemployment is greater in reality than the figures imply.

I could entertain the House with the follies of South West Water. We pay the highest water bills in the country for a service that leaves many of our beaches polluted and fails to provide the long-term investment for which Falmouth, in particular, is crying out. However, this debate is about Cornwall Care.

I believe that all Members from Cornwall must work and speak together on issues of concern to the county. There is much that the new Government must do to remedy the ills of the past 18 years of Conservative rule. I am certain that there will be times when the Liberal Democrats are critical of the new Government; equally, there will be times when I am critical of the actions of Liberal Democrats. That is the nature of all good relationships: we all fall out occasionally. This is one of those times.

The tragedy that has prompted this debate has led some to dub the charity, "Cornwall Doesn't Care", but I leave it to right hon. and hon. Members to decide for themselves. The problem is one that all too many local authorities have had to face. The Conservative Government slanted the figures so that it was financially better for many authorities to transfer their residential homes for the elderly to housing association or charity status.

Several years ago, Cornwall county council recognised that it was facing a problem with its 18 residential homes for the elderly. Two and a half years ago, a report was produced that suggested that four homes should be closed. Understandably, there was uproar when it was published. People, including the then chair of policy and resources, in whose ward one of the homes was located, do not want their local homes to close.

The controlling group proposed that a new charity, Cornwall Care, should be created. The county council would retain ownership of the homes but the services would be delivered by Cornwall Care. Last April, the new charity took control of the services and announced that existing staff would have to sign new contracts of employment considerably worsening their terms and conditions.

Many of us recognised that the figures did not add up and that the new charity would be forced to take action when the staff were transferred into their employment. I met many of the staff, some of whom faced losing more than £300 a month. That was their mortgage, and many told me that they would not be able to survive financially under the new terms.

For weeks, pressure was put on those caring members of staff to sign the new contracts. They were told that if they failed to sign, they would lose their jobs. I have some knowledge of transfer of undertakings law and I joined many others in publicly warning the charity that it would face industrial tribunals.

Eventually, 249 staff decided to take their cases to an industrial tribunal. All were dismissed. That was not an easy decision for them to make. Many had worked for the county council for more than 20 years, and I know that their decision caused them great anguish and misery. To a man and a woman—they were mostly women—they said that they loved working with the residents and wanted to continue doing so, but that they could not and would not sign the contracts.

The case was heard in Truro in the middle of the general election campaign. The former staff won and the result was widely publicised in the national media. Since then, the situation has deteriorated. The charity has announced that it will be forced into liquidation if an appeal is unsuccessful, and I understand that it has recently said that it faced severe financial problems whatever the result of the appeal. That has meant that existing staff are concerned for their futures and that residents—and their families—are worried about where they will live. The staff who won the industrial tribunal feel pressure not to take up their legal entitlement and a general miasma of worry is hanging in the air.

During the election campaign, I met folk in tears about the situation. I met one woman, who was clutching a letter from Cornwall Care and who was in tears on her doorstep. She implored me to act as soon as I won the election, because she was so worried about her mother, who was a resident in one of the homes in my constituency. That was one reason why I, with many other hon. Members, signed an early-day motion about Cornwall Care last month.

Meanwhile, the county council, which was embroiled in elections itself during the general election campaign, said that the problem was for Cornwall Care to resolve. My intention in requesting this Adjournment debate was to knock a few heads together at Cornwall Care and the council. The county council, as the owner and purchaser of the service, has a responsibility to resolve the problem. Occasionally, local government gets its priorities wrong and sometimes councillors make the wrong decisions. When Labour local authorities err, as a party and a Government, we have rightly condemned them. It is time for the Liberal Democrats to do the same.

I have consulted the Liberal Democrats' general election manifesto, which was entitled "Make the Difference". It states:

"Older people in Britain should be able to look forward to a retirement of security, opportunity and dignity. Older people feel that they are fast becoming Britain's forgotten generation."

Many of the residents of Cornwall Care feel that they have been forgotten, that they have no security and that the whole sorry mess is very undignified.

Many of us believe that the county council knew that Cornwall Care would lose at an industrial tribunal. It is not right for local authorities to transfer a problem to another body rather than face the political flak. The residents and their families and the former and current staff need to be reassured about their futures. The whole sorry mess could, and should, have been avoided. The elderly in Cornwall deserve better and I call on the Liberal Democrats in Parliament, from whom I would like to hear on the issue some day, to demand that their colleagues on Cornwall county council to resolve the problem.

12.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Paul Boateng): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) on her maiden speech. It showed passion, conviction and high intelligence, and was in the best tradition of maiden speeches in that it touched on a matter dear to her heart and those of her constituents. We look forward to more such contributions in the many years during which she will grace the House.

My hon. Friend began her speech by referring to her predecessor as a Labour Member of Parliament in Falmouth and Camborne, Frank Hayman. She stirred childhood memories of mine, because Frank Hayman was known in Cornwall and throughout the west country for his radical and caring contribution to the politics of the region. At that time, my grandparents, who retired to the west country for the beauty of its vistas and the friendliness of its people—which, as my hon. Friend mentioned, are the main reasons for its attractiveness—lived in Exmouth in Devon. There was a shortage of Labour Members in Devon for a time, but I am happy to say that has been remedied by the election of my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw). Frank Hayman was pre-eminent in the Labour party as parliamentary private secretary to the then leader of the Opposition, Hugh Gaitskell and his name always brought a cheer to my grandparents' household in Withycombe Raleigh. I therefore have great pleasure in responding to the debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne.

The number of senior citizens drawn to the west country means that the issue of care for the elderly is important in Cornwall. My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne is right to give that issue the prominence that she has by requesting an Adjournment debate. I can assure her that the Government are committed to ensuring that we introduce a proper structure for the long-term residential care of the elderly. We are determined to meet their needs and achieve value for money while preserving their dignity. They are still able to make a valuable contribution to the community and we must not ignore that. They deserve the dignity that comes from knowing that their place in the community is secure.

My hon. Friend rightly drew attention to the problems affecting the security of elderly people in her constituency. We are concerned about whether the Cornwall Care trust will be able to continue to operate, but I can reassure my hon. Friend that the Government will not stand by and allow people to be made homeless if the trust collapses. The Government, together with local authorities, have a responsibility to ensure that old people do not find themselves in that position. Through the social services inspectorate, we are monitoring the situation closely to ensure that Cornwall county council properly exercises its social services duties to vulnerable people in need of residential care.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The Minister will be aware that I led an all-party delegation from the county council to meet his predecessor. It is notable that, with the exception of one hon. Gentleman who has just arrived, no members of the Conservative party are present in the Chamber, because it is unrepresented in Cornwall. The previous Minister made it clear that he wanted the county council to be completely detached from all provision of residential care. He wanted it all put out to the private sector. The Liberal Democrats welcome the fact that the new Government take a different attitude. I ask the Minister to recognise that many other local authorities, including Labour ones, have had to adopt similar provisions to those in Cornwall. Those authorities will

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

listen carefully to the assurance that he has just given that the Government will be prepared to help the authorities—I hope, financially—to maintain their responsibilities.

Mr. Boateng: I make it clear that we recognise that, alongside local authorities, the Government have a responsibility to ensure that no old people are made homeless when a trust such as the one in Cornwall collapses. I shall come in due course to the Government's attitude towards the balance of private-public provision and the role that we believe voluntary, private and statutory sectors should play.

The county council has assured the social services inspectorate that it is fully aware of its responsibilities towards residents and that it will act to protect their interest. Contingency plans have been made to cover the transfer of residents from homes owned by Cornwall Care in the event that the trust collapses. Any such transfer will be made over a reasonable period of time and will take full account of residents' individual needs. We shall monitor the situation very closely in that regard.

I am very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne for drawing the matter to the attention of the House. She is right—it may grieve hon. Members on the Liberal Benches—to point out that the controlling party on the county council, the Liberal Democrat party, must bear some responsibility for what has arisen. It does bear some responsibility. It has, of course, the responsibility to ensure that it puts in place arrangements that protect, secure and safeguard the position of senior citizens for whose care it is responsible. I hope and believe that it will be mindful of that responsibility.

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boateng: No, I have given way enough to Liberal Democrats.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne that we shall do all in our power to ensure that the ruling party has available to it the advice that the social services inspectorate is on hand to give. The Liberal Democrat ruling party can be sure that that advice will be forthcoming.

I look forward to visiting the west country—tomorrow, as it happens—where I shall be meeting the assistant director of social services for Cornwall, Sandra Whitehead, with whom I shall certainly raise the concerns expressed in this debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne. I shall do so not least because Sandra Whitehead will be accompanied by the director of Age Concern, which I have no doubt has its own concerns about the welfare of residents.

My hon. Friend highlighted the fact that very many members of our older generation feel disenchanted and disenfranchised. They feel that they have been let down—and they were shamefully let down by the previous Government. It is our intention to address those feelings of betrayal. We are determined to bring senior citizens very much into the centre of our policy making and provision. We are determined that they shall be empowered and enabled by the process, rather than disenfranchised, as they understandably and justifiably feel that they are.

We want consistency and fairness, which is why we have made clear our intention to introduce a long-term care charter that tells people what standards and services they are entitled to expect from health, social services and housing. In developing that charter, we shall work closely with service users to ensure that their views are taken on board. We believe in genuine consultation in developing policies. Had such consultation taken place earlier in Cornwall, had those in a position to affect events been able to draw on the wisdom of our senior citizens and organisations that represent them, we would not find ourselves on the sorry path on which we find ourselves today.

We attach importance to proceeding not on the basis of whether provision is in the public or private sector or on the basis that characterised the previous Government's attitude of private good, public bad—that was a previous dispensation and is no longer so—but with determination to ensure that what counts is quality; that what matters is value added to the lives of the recipients of care and value for money for those who are called on through their taxes and contributions at local and national level. We intend to ensure that people get such value.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne referred to some matters that are the subject of an industrial tribunal and an appeals process. She will understand why I cannot involve myself in such matters, which are for the industrial tribunal and the courts, where they and the issues that have arisen from litigation are being addressed. Industrial tribunals are independent judicial bodies and Ministers cannot comment on their decisions or intervene, as I am sure my hon. Friend understands.

It is important, not only Ministers but for the whole House—my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne did it in no uncertain terms—to highlight the value that we attach to those who work in residential homes. The people who work in homes, such as those managed by Cornwall Care, do a hard and at times difficult job, very often in circumstances in which they do not feel as appreciated as they might. We appreciate them; they are engaged in a very important task. We ask of them to care for those who are older and vulnerable.

The Government are committed to ensuring that the staff of our residential and other homes feel that they have access to not only high-quality training but, as individuals and through their unions and associations of staff and workers, development of policy.

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Boateng: No.

The staff have a wisdom through day-to-day contact with senior citizens from which we could all benefit.

I very much look forward to the contributions of my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne on this subject. She clearly displays a knowledge of the contribution of her constituents who are not only in

receipt of care but responsible for giving it on a day-to-day basis. Her voice will be particularly welcome in that regard. Her academic discipline in social studies will obviously be of enormous value to the House and her constituents in such an important area of social policy.

We are concerned that, throughout the country, there should be a system of care for the elderly that is buttressed by a framework that provides good quality care not simply for those who have the ability to buy it but for those who need it. That is crucial to our vision of that care.

In due course, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce how we propose to fulfil our commitment on the funding of long-term care for the elderly. In the meantime, we shall continue to promote high-quality provision, ensure fair access to it and offer opportunity and choice to all.

Salisbury Bypass

1 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): It is a great pleasure to welcome the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Ms Jackson), to her new position. I wish her well. I am sure that she will enjoy her new role, and I know that she will discover that it is a controversial job.

My contribution is not intended to be controversial. Indeed, it will be completely non-controversial and non-confrontational as long as I get the answers that I need. First, please may we have a decision on the Salisbury bypass, and please can the answer be yes?

As I pointed out in a letter to the Minister's colleague, Baroness Hayman, we have just been through a general election in which I was the only candidate in Salisbury in favour of the bypass. In fact, I have favoured it for about 30 years for the city in which I grew up—long before I became the local Member of Parliament. The Labour party had a sensible attitude about the bypass and said that it should be subject to a review. Its candidate said that he was not opposed to a Salisbury bypass; indeed, he said that he rather favoured a ring road of some sort. Of course, my principal opponent, the Liberal Democrat, was opposed to the bypass. There was a shift in the Green vote, which went up from 609 to 623. That was a small increase despite the fact that every possible opportunity was taken during the election campaign to turn the ballot into a bypass referendum. I rejected that attempt, but I know that some people thought that we had such a referendum, and I know that a lot of views were swayed in my favour on that basis.

Salisbury is a mediaeval city and its transport problems are not soley connected with trunk routes. In fact, there are seven radial routes into and out of the city, but the bypass is a free-standing proposal. That is what makes it different from many other proposals that are connected to trunk road schemes or even trans-European networks. The bypass proposal is probably the most free standing of those considered by the old Department of Transport.

I am sure that the Minister will be delighted to hear that I do not intend to reconsider the evidence of the public inquiry. That does not mean that I and all those in favour of the bypass have not taken it seriously. I have discovered, however, that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, especially for the people who have not lived with the problem for as many years as I have.

I am aware that a lot has happened since the inquiry closed. For example, the bypass has been considered by the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment and the royal commission on environmental pollution. Planning policy guidance notes have been issued, as well as a sustainable development strategy. We have also had the great transport debate. Many other important changes have taken place, some technical and some political, including the general election, in which transport was, quite rightly, an issue.

I know that Ministers must and will take all those findings into account. They will listen to all the individuals who have expressed an interest—including the lobbying groups and the environmental campaigners—and then they will make their decision. Today, I want to

[Mr. Robert Key]

ensure that the Minister is aware that the decision on the bypass should be taken according to a broad view of the problem.

There are lessons to be learnt from what we have been through in Salisbury. First, that bypass is a case study of poor public sector decision making. The same could be said of the private sector if that bypass had happened to be a private sector proposal. That, however, is the subject for another debate.

I have been aware of the problem not just as a long-standing resident—I have lived there on and off since 1947—but as the local Member of Parliament and as a Minister at both the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport.

It is true that the previous Government made a number of improvements to the system according to which we decide on the transport infrastructure, particularly roads, with the introduction of round-table conferences and changes to the procedures governing public inquiries, but we did not go nearly far enough. I hope that the new Government will have a radical look at the way in which we reach solutions on the transport infrastructure, because it is not just about roads.

I welcome the merger of the Departments of the Environment and of Transport. That will make life much easier and more sensible, because it will remove the destructive rivalry that previously existed, which did none of us any good. If we can concentrate instead on the enormous wealth of talent and expertise at professional and civil service level in those former Departments, we shall be able to contribute significantly to an improved transport system.

The second lesson that I draw from the Salisbury bypass fiasco is that it is quite wrong to make a judgment solely on the ground of flora and fauna. I am not belittling for one moment the arguments of those who have quite rightly put forward the scientific arguments in favour of retaining the environment as it is without interference. Indeed, they have a duty to do so. I have, however, seen remarkable examples of translocation of flora and fauna in connection with various modes of transport including roads, railways, bridges and docks. That means that a sensible approach can be adopted, unless something is so utterly unique that it must not be moved even a few feet.

I want to ensure that the debate on the Salisbury bypass is put in a wider context, because any Government must ensure that that debate is considered in the context of the real world of people. It must be judged according to the quality of life of those who live in Salisbury and its surrounding villages. After all, we are talking about their inheritance, because their forefathers built their communities and shaped the valleys and fields. We are talking about people's employment and their entitlement to the quiet enjoyment of their city and countryside and their local leisure activities.

In the past year or more, we have heard a deafening roar from the green lobby about the Salisbury bypass. Some of its comments have been very silly indeed. I was always brought up to believe that one should not believe what one reads in the papers. Some of the choicest comments about the bypass have been published in some of the flashiest broadsheets. For example, I have read nonsense such as:

"Labour will halt the controversial Salisbury bypass, which will ruin one of the best-loved views in Britain, if it wins the general election."

That was reported under a headline which ran:

"Immortalised by Constable, threatened by the Tories . . . saved by Meacher?"

I have read a number of choice comments that are simply not true. For example, it has been claimed that the bypass would destroy

"the last open view of Salisbury Cathedral across the water meadows."

What tripe. It has been claimed that it will

"seriously damage the water meadows".

In fact, the main water meadows are scarcely touched by the scheme. It has also been claimed that the bypass will

"do little to ease congestion in Salisbury as only 6 per cent. of the vehicles entering the city are through-traffic."

It is extraordinary that anyone should have worked out such figures. All manner of claims have been made. Poor old Constable, he seems to have a lot to answer for.

Some rather more seriously damaging material has also been published by the Countryside Commission, which should know better. I hope that the Minister will always ensure that the information that she is given is high quality and concentrates on scientific or landscape considerations, rather than on sheer emotion.

The Countryside Commission recently published an expensive brochure full of colour photographs. Of the seven photographs of the area of the bypass, four are looking in the wrong direction. Those areas have nothing to do with the bypass. Of the four Constable paintings reproduced in that brochure, not one is anywhere near the bypass or represents any part of the countryside through which that bypass would go. That brochure does not do the standing of the Countryside Commission any good. People must be part of the decision making.

We cannot ignore the built environment. Ministers have to consider not only the countryside heritage, but the built heritage. A main reason for building the Salisbury bypass is to give the city of Salisbury back to the people for whom it was designed. It is a unique mediaeval cathedral city; it was designed in a piece with a chequered pattern of shops and dwelling houses around its heart. It was designed for people and we want it to return to them. The built environment is part of the reason for the bypass, which will take traffic further away. I have seen a lot of press gossip saying that the scheme is dreadful because it puts a motorway close to the cathedral. The reverse is true, but when has the truth mattered when debating environmental arguments?

The built environment and heritage are crucial. Salisbury is at the centre of seven radial routes. We want to ensure that Salisbury is given back to the people and not swamped, either by local people using the roads or by through traffic that does not want to be there. We should make a judgment on all the environmental issues, not just the green issues.

Another lesson to be learnt is that delay is bad for people; it is bad for their quality of life and for their jobs. It is even bad for the very policies about which the anti-roads lobby claims to care. I am president of the Cycling Opportunities Group for Salisbury—COGS—and

last Saturday we had a raffle in the marketplace; we had a day of celebrating cycling and cycling policy in the district. The irony is that the Salisbury transport strategy—including county council transport policies and programmes that will do so much to introduce cycle routes around Salisbury—is on ice because of the bypass decision. That is folly.

There is something else special about the Salisbury bypass. It is part of a design, build, finance and operate—DBFO—scheme called the Wessex link, which involves more than simply Salisbury. It is sensible and strategic to consider such matters in one go rather than to tackle them in a piecemeal fashion. There are two groups in the scheme: the A36 scheme, which is the Salisbury bypass, and the Heytesbury to Codford improvement. There are also the A303 schemes—Stockton Wood to Wylye, Mere to Chicklade, which includes the Chicklade bypass, the Ilminster bypass and the Sparkford bypass in the west country. Those schemes are all linked to the decision.

I must also mention the A303 where it passes Stonehenge and the welcome announcement by English Heritage that it wants on-line dualling past the stones, which is what the Department of Transport wanted in the first place and what local people certainly want. Local people might be reconciled to a tunnel if we could find the money for it. I hope that that will not lead to open warfare with the National Trust, but that is a subject for another occasion.

While we wait for the decision, we have a rough time locally. The Brunel link bridge, linking a major industrial estate out of the city centre to the bypass, should have been built 30 years ago or more. When Salisbury rural district council, as it then was, built the industrial estate, it promised the traders and industrialists moving on to it that the bridge was included as part of the deal. They have been scrapping ever since. The Netherhampton road roundabout on the proposed bypass has been put in at the request of Wiltshire county council and would be paid for by the council—that is a measure of its good endeavours.

While we wait for the decision—and my goodness, how we have waited—there is traffic chaos in central Salisbury. Let us consider the situation. There is a mediaeval city; there is a row about a car stack; a multi-storey car park is cancelled; another car park is closed while it is being refurbished; while that is happening, the marketplace is dug up and half the parking spaces are cancelled—a matter over which the traders are taking legal action—parking charges are doubled to compensate for the lack of parking spaces; the area is pedestrianised and the traffic flows in the city centre are changed without proper consultation; a multi-million pound park-and-ride scheme is embarked on without any consultation with the biggest employers in the town; an investigation is conducted into the possibility of introducing into the middle of the mediaeval city trams that will run into Cathedral close.

I am delighted to assure the Minister that neither of us is responsible for that chaos. The Liberal Democrats have presided over that chaos, which has been pathetic and appallingly sad for the ancient city of Salisbury, its modern people and traders. The Minister and I both want to help and I know that she will leave no stone unturned in her attempt to resolve this terrible mess. The best thing that she could do would be to give us a decision on the Salisbury bypass, because so much flows from that.

I wish to ask the Minister a question on a practical point—I do not expect an answer now, but I ask her to consider it. One reason why so many people who are reconciled to the need for a bypass are still anxious about it is the height of the embankment across East Harnham meadows, which is up to 7 m—more than 20 ft. Part of the reason for that is gradient engineering—the road goes down into a valley and up the other side. Another reason involves the height needed to plant trees to screen the road.

The height may also be necessary to ensure clearance across the waterways, although I am not sure who will use them. There have been incidents of canoeists trying to use them, but canoes do not have big clearance problems. The meadows are not put to a lot of use and there is no commercial boat traffic. There is an access problem for farm and National Rivers Authority vehicles travelling along the sides of the road. There is a case for trying to lower the road by several metres; that may be possible even if it means that the road has to undulate slightly over the main river channel. That would help the residents of Bridford, who would not feel so cut off from the city of Salisbury up the river.

There is no ducking or dodging the problem of where the bypass would cross the river. In engineering terms, there is no doubt that it could run through a submerged tunnel, possibly a deep-bore tunnel, but that is not very practical. The one thing that is certain is that if the bypass is not built, traffic congestion—involving both through and local traffic—will become worse. There are various things that we can do. The Minister and I know that we could price people off the road in various ways. But a public transport network, even in Salisbury and its surrounding villages, would do no more than chip away at the edges of the problem in Salisbury—as the inspector who undertook the inquiry acknowledged in his report.

I welcome the Government's new approach to an integrated transport strategy. I am looking forward to hearing what that means in detail. I know that we shall have to wait until next spring for that. We must ensure that an integrated transport policy does not mean simply cancelling bypasses or simply cancelling roads; I am sure that it will not.

Public perception matters more than anything else. Having tackled and lived with the problems that the Minister now confronts on a daily basis, I know that ultimately our attitude to transport will change when individual attitudes change and people ask themselves whether their journey is really necessary. The Department's engineers and policy makers will be able to tell the Minister about all sorts of tricks of the trade, but public perception is important.

The bypass proposal has been around in one form or another for 60 years. The present scheme was first proposed 15 years ago and was first taken to public consultation nine years ago. We then had the longest and most expensive public inquiry into a road. There was more consultation last year and even more consultation this year. I hope very much that we shall not have to wait much longer for a decision. Any decision would be welcome. A "yes" decision would have us cheering the Minister to the rafters.

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on obtaining this Adjournment debate. I regret

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

that there are so few hon. Members in the Chamber. We have been given an object lesson in a Member of Parliament's primary responsibility: the advocacy of his or her constituents' interests, and of constituency interests.

The hon. Gentleman's own advocacy in respect of the Salisbury bypass is, as he has already said, well known and I assure him that I have listened carefully to his speech and taken due note of the points that he made. I am sure that he will agree that this is a particularly sensitive scheme, which has attracted considerable opposition, but which also has its supporters. As he also pointed out, it falls to the new Government to decide whether the bypass should be given the go-ahead.

Following the 1993-94 public inquiry, we are still in the statutory decision-making phase of the proposed bypass scheme. It would not, therefore, be appropriate for me to comment on the merits of the scheme, as Ministers have yet to take a final decision; nor, I regret to say, can I indicate when a final decision might be announced. It might, however, help the House to understand why this case has taken so long without a decision being reached if I explain the steps that have already been taken.

It is true that the proposals for the bypass have been at the planning stage for a very long time. The proposed bypass entered the trunk road programme in 1984 and there followed feasibility studies to identify possible route options. As a former Roads Minister, the hon. Gentleman will appreciate the prime importance of correct route selection if resultant harm to the natural and built environment—an issue which he touched on to great effect—is to be kept to a minimum. The outcome of the feasibility studies identified three possible routes and those were made the subject of a public consultation exercise held in 1988. The result of that consultation was strong public support for a route crossing the River Avon flood plain to the south of the city. In the light of that preference, the preferred route for a southern bypass was announced in 1989. Further design work for that route was then carried out, together with a full environmental impact assessment. The draft statutory orders for the bypass and an environmental statement assessing its impact were first published in 1991.

Objections to the published draft orders triggered the convening of a public inquiry, which lasted for a year, from April 1993 to April 1994. It was an exhaustive inquiry, which explored all aspects of the bypass proposals, including the need for the scheme and its impact on the environment. Twenty-four alternative proposals to the published route were considered, as well as many alternative junction arrangements.

The independent inspector, Sir Peter Buchanan, made his report on the inquiry to the then Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport in September 1995. Given the length of the inquiry, it is understandable that it should have taken him more than 12 months to write the report. Some 300 sources objected to the bypass, 20 of which were subsequently withdrawn; there were 280 pro forma objections and four petitions of objection; and some 40 sources registered support. Having weighed all the evidence put before him at the public inquiry, the inspector came to these overall conclusions: that there was a need for the A36 between the terminal points of the proposed bypass to be upgraded to modern trunk road standards; that there was a need to remove A36 through traffic from Salisbury and from the Wylye valley villages to the north-west of the city; and that, despite its adverse impacts, the published route for the bypass—with certain modifications—would provide the best solution.

Having heard the arguments of the Department of Transport justifying the published bypass proposals, the expressions of support for the bypass, and the arguments put forward by objectors, the inspector had come down in favour of giving the go-ahead to the bypass. However, the inspector could not take into consideration developments after the public inquiry had closed and the further representations about the scheme that were subsequently received. Those had to be taken into consideration by the then Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Transport, alongside the inspector's report.

Three significant post-inquiry developments occurred in the case of the Salisbury bypass. First, in December 1994, the report "Trunk Roads and the Generation of Traffic" by the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment was published. In its response to that report, the then Government undertook that the effects of generated traffic would be considered in connection with all schemes at the planning stage, which included the Salisbury bypass. The economic benefits of the scheme were reassessed, taking into account new technical guidance on induced traffic issued by the Department. The report on that assessment was received in September 1996.

Secondly, in September 1995, English Nature notified its intention to designate East Harnham meadows as a site of special scientific interest. The site's designation was confirmed in February 1996. If the Salisbury bypass were to be built as proposed, it would mean taking just over one hectare of land from the south-eastern edge of the 17 hectare site. The hon. Gentleman referred to the parliamentary brief published today by the World Wide Fund for Nature, which claims that four hectares would be taken. I asked my officials, who repeated that they believe that claim to be inaccurate and that only one hectare would need to be taken. Although at the time of the inquiry the site had not been designated as an SSSI, the high ecological value of East Harnham meadows was acknowledged in the environmental statement and considered by the inspector in reaching his conclusions. Nevertheless, the subsequent notification of the site was a material change that had to be taken into account.

Thirdly, at the time of the inquiry, the intention to notify the River Avon system as an SSSI was known. Subsequently, however, English Nature, through the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, advised the Secretary of State for the Environment that, in its opinion, parts of the River Avon and its tributaries qualified for consideration as a possible special area of conservation under the European Community habitats directive.

Having considered the inspector's report, the developments to which I have just referred and other post-inquiry developments and representations, the then Secretaries of State announced at the end of last October their views on the bypass. Those were set out in detail in an interim letter sent to all interested parties. At the same time, the inspector's report and the induced traffic assessment report were published.

Although they were minded to confirm the orders authorising construction of the bypass, before taking a final decision, the Secretaries of State instructed the

Highways Agency, in consultation with English Nature, to review the bypass route across the River Avon flood plain and investigate mitigation of its possible impact on the proposed River Avon special area of conservation. The main reason for that review was to see whether it would be possible to avoid the newly designated East Harnham meadows SSSI. The agency was also instructed to review, in consultation with the Countryside Commission, mitigation of the overall landscape impact of the bypass on the sensitive area south of Salisbury. The agency was given four months to report on those matters.

The Secretaries of State also afforded interested parties an opportunity to make further representations on two issues: the economic benefits of the scheme in the light of the report on the effects of induced traffic; and the adoption, as recommended by the inspector, of a modification to the bypass route to take it further away from housing on the southern outskirts of Salisbury. The Highways Agency review report, including reports to the agency by English Nature and the Countryside Commission, was published on 21 March. It identified two alternative route options for the bypass across the River Avon flood plain that avoided the need to take any land from the East Harnham meadows SSSI. Interested parties were invited to comment on the review report by 2 May.

We have now received more than 3,000 representations about the bypass since last October's announcement. Around 90 per cent. have arisen as a result of organised campaigns for or against the bypass. The remainder have addressed the specific issues on which interested parties were invited to comment, including the Highways Agency review report. No decision on the bypass will be taken until the comments on the agency's report and other representations received have been considered by Ministers. At the same time, we shall want to look at the bypass proposals in the context of our strategic review of the trunk road programme. We expect to make an announcement about that review shortly.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the height of a particular embankment and he had the great courtesy to contact my officials about the matter yesterday, thereby giving them and me the opportunity to respond. It appears that the height is not necessary to facilitate farm vehicles underneath the bridges crossing the three main waterways. The bypass would come down off high ground to the west of the flood plain. After crossing, it must go over an elevated junction at Petersfinger to the east. The need to avoid sharp changes in gradient and to give adequate clearance of the bridges in the event of flooding dictates the embankment height—so I am informed by officials.

I appreciate that the continuing uncertainty about the bypass is frustrating, but I know that the hon. Gentleman understands that the bypass proposal is particularly sensitive. We must consider all aspects—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We must move on to the next debate.

Whitley Park, Huddersfield

1.30 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I welcome you to your new position, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is the first speech that I have made in the new Parliament and therefore it is the first opportunity for me to congratulate you and wish you well. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and wish her well. She is certainly earning her money, because this is the second debate to which she has had to reply today.

I am grateful for this opportunity to raise concerns about recent events at Whitley park. What has happened there shows the need urgently and significantly to strengthen existing environmental protection measures.

My hon. Friend the Minister is aware that the Wakefield constituency was radically changed at the general election and now includes the two Kirklees wards of Kirkburton and Denby Dale, which were previously within the Dewsbury constituency. Whitley park is situated within the Kirkburton ward, between Huddersfield and Wakefield, to the west of the village of Grange Moor and to the north east of the village of Lepton. It is an area of privately owned land that contains woodland, copses and open fields. During my teens, I had a friend who lived on a farm in Grange Moor and we regularly roamed around the Whitley park area. I therefore share the very high regard of local people for its value as an outstanding local beauty spot. I also share the concern about the recent destruction of several copses within the park and understand the anger and outrage that have united local people in the Lepton and Grange Moor areas.

As my hon. Friend is aware, the land concerned is owned by a company called Elliotts Bricks Ltd. It is based in Lepton and is involved in the production of facing and engineering bricks. I understand that, over recent years, it has bought a considerable amount of the local green belt with the longer-term intention of mining clay through opencast methods.

In the short time that I have represented the Lepton area, I have received an almost constant stream of complaints about the company's activities, most recently concerning the burning of wool sludge. I gather that these representations are nothing out of the ordinary. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who hopes to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has constituents in nearby Kirkheaton who have raised concerns about the company. My hon. Friend was quoted in the *Huddersfield Examiner* on 3 April as saying:

"Elliotts have a long history of activities which local people have objected to very strongly."

As my hon. Friend will recall, two years ago local communities took great exception to Elliotts stripping natural vegetation on four acres of land that it owned at Lepton common. I understand that, in doing so, it had destroyed some active badger setts. I want briefly to quote press coverage at the time. On 2 June 1995, the *Huddersfield District Chronicle* reported that a wildlife haven had been destroyed and said:

"Bulldozers have torn through a wildlife oasis that has been on maps for more than 1,000 years.

Outraged villagers watched helplessly as bulldozers ploughed into Lepton Common . . . on Sunday morning. Vegetation left in their wake was torched.

Four-acres of gorse bushes—home to badgers, a vixen and four cubs, rabbits and numerous birds—was destroyed."

On Saturday 10 June, the *Huddersfield Examiner* talked about

"The rape of Lepton Common".

The most recent damage caused by Elliotts occurred at Whitley park over the Easter period, against a background of strenuous protests by concerned local residents. I want to pay particular tribute to those involved for drawing attention to what was happening and for their vigorous attempts to stop it. In particular, I want to mention the efforts of a local parish councillor, Roy Dobson, whose vigilance led to the company's intentions being anticipated early on the morning of Easter Tuesday, 1 April. Mr. Dobson, who lives nearby, spotted a bulldozer in the park and alerted local residents, who arrived on the scene as the driver started ripping up one of the copses within the park. Mr. Dobson was supported by other local residents, including Mr. Robert Gunn, Mr. Mike Greethan and local Kirklees councillors, Peter Sykes, Eileen Blunt and Mel Munday—representing, incidentally, all three main political parties on the local authority.

After the first copse had been partially cleared of vegetation, the driver was persuaded to stop to allow an investigation of the claim that there were active badger setts in the area being cleared. I understand that an agreement was reached for the local residents and the company separately to consult two different badger experts prior to any resumption of clearance work. In addition to myself, the head of planning services for Kirklees council, Mr. Keith Faragher, paid an urgent visit to the site to consider any steps that the local authority might be able to take. I pay tribute to his willingness to turn out over a bank holiday weekend. The fact that he found himself effectively powerless to prevent the destruction is a key issue, to which I shall come later.

After the work was halted, local residents were given to understand that they would meet representatives of Elliotts the following day to discuss evidence of badger activity, but the company cancelled the meeting on the ground that its experts had not had the opportunity to visit the site. Residents were then advised that bulldozing would be resumed on the Thursday afternoon of that week. The local residents attempted to stand in front of the bulldozers and to open their doors, but it was to no avail—within three hours, three circular copses, well-loved features of the Whitley park estate for at least 100 years, had been destroyed. The company set the freshly dug peat mounds on fire, with burning hay bales tossed on to the remaining vegetation.

Although I understand that there is no positive proof of active badger setts in the immediate vicinity, the copses involved—primarily populated by rhododendrons—provided cover for a variety of birds and other wildlife. The indiscriminate destruction both removed that habitat and killed some of its resident wildlife, in particular rabbits.

I realise that there are rules about using photographs in debates, but I want to pass to my hon. Friend the Minister some photographs showing before-and-after scenes of the site. They illustrate, in a far more realistic way than I can, what really happened. I hope that she will look at those photographs in detail.

The owners of the land eventually made a statement to the local press suggesting that their actions formed part of a "comprehensive whole farm plan" based on advice that the rhododendrons should be cleared. I am aware that such plants sometimes require control, in particular where there are grazing animals, but there can be no justification for the indiscriminate destruction at Whitley park over the Easter period. I look to the new Government to ensure that such irresponsible actions by landowners are not permitted in law in future.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend's Department has announced a review of existing hedgerow protection, especially as I understand that the new hedgerow regulations of 1 June have made no difference to existing powers to restrain such actions. Will the Minister look at the weakness of existing legislation as evidenced in this case? I would welcome her comments on the apparent inconsistencies in whether vegetation within a copse where trees are subject to a tree preservation order is protected in law.

In a ruling some years ago, Lord Denning determined that the site of a wood—undergrowth, seedlings, plants, and so on—is protected, not just individual trees. The local authority, however, has advised me that, although the trees within the copses concerned have been protected by a tree preservation order since 1950, because they are defined as group G2 containing beech and sycamore, reference to the definition of a tree in woodland as per Lord Denning's decision is not relevant. It also said that the plant material destroyed was not trees but mainly rhododendrons, which clearly has a bearing on any approach that might be taken to protect such copses.

I recognise that, despite their attractiveness, especially at this time of year, rhododendrons are regarded by some as an invasive weed. I understand the need to exercise control, particularly if their growth suppresses natural tree regeneration, but such control should be exercised by on-going and sensitive removal of the vegetation concerned, not by what the local parish council chairman described as "environmental vandalism". Even if the case for removing such vegetation is accepted, there must be controls to prevent the indiscriminate bulldozing witnessed at Whitley park, and those controls appear to be lacking.

I should also welcome the Minister's thoughts on the relevance of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to what has happened at Whitley park. That legislation makes it an offence intentionally to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built. Given that the destruction took place in early April, when it was presumably known that birds were likely to be nesting within the sites in question—I have pictures that show that nests were destroyed—is the Minister satisfied that the Act has sufficient powers to protect wildlife in such circumstances and that the enforcement of those powers is sufficiently understood by those responsible?

The police were involved at Whitley park. They were called by Elliotts to ensure public safety and public order, but I strongly suspect that the officers concerned were not aware of their possible role in enforcing the 1981 legislation in such cases.

The Minister will accept fully the reasons for the public outcry over what happened recently at Whitley park. Local people do not want to prevent proper management

of the land in question, if it is done in an environmentally responsible way. That has not been the case, however, and the wanton destruction witnessed at Easter and two years earlier is unacceptable.

My constituents feel that, if such action is not illegal, environmental protection laws leave a great deal to be desired. I appreciate that the problem I have described is complex, but I hope that the Minister can offer some assurances that important lessons will be learned from those events and that action will be taken to prevent a repetition.

1.43 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I rise briefly to support my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). I represented the area that he describes and now represents when I was elected to the House. It is a beautiful part of the country which moves from constituency to constituency. The Leader of the House represented it for three elections. We have therefore all shared that part of the constituency and are familiar with the company which often acts ruthlessly and tends to destroy the environment. A few years ago in Kirkheaton, there was a large campaign to stop mining—the company wanted to take out a whole hillside and destroy the natural environment.

I am a great exponent in the House of Britain's business success and am impressed by the work of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce on behalf of tomorrow's companies. Although hon. Members want to promote tomorrow's companies, Elliotts Bricks is one of yesterday's companies, with which it is difficult to have a dialogue. The rules of tomorrow's companies include looking after stakeholders, employees, shareholders, the supply chain, customers and, most of all, the community in which the business sits. I appeal to that company, which refuses to speak to local Members of Parliament, local authorities or local communities, to open up a dialogue.

It cannot be right for companies to treat the English countryside as though they own it lock, stock and barrel. The environment is simply in trust for a short time to those who own it. It is not owned in the full sense of ownership; it is only on loan, whatever our relationship with it. I wish to share with the House my dismay at the destruction that has taken place around that site by a company that does not feel bound by the normal laws of human behaviour. If our laws cannot prevent the destruction of what I consider to be historic green belt land, there must be something wrong with the law. I hope that, under the new Labour Government, we shall see real changes in terms of protecting the English countryside through green belt legislation and other protective measures, because it is a resource for us all to share.

The company in question is in the minority. Most companies, landowners and farmers preserve our countryside and heritage, but a few seem to go about their business ruthlessly and suffer no penalties. We must have rules, regulations and legislation that get the balance right and deter people from doing what is only too often witnessed when a ruthless operator goes in with heavy machinery. These days, the most ghastly earth-moving equipment can do enormous damage in a short time. The owners then sit back and say, "Fine us. What are the worst consequences?" That is not the way to protect our environment and heritage.

I know that the Minister has a broad-ranging brief and that some hon. Members will urge all sorts of environmental changes, including the right to ramble, but I hope that this matter will be taken extremely seriously.

1.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Angela Eagle): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on securing time to draw the House's attention to a recent incident in his constituency which has raised much local concern. I thank him for his good wishes and his observation that I am earning my money. I hope that somebody somewhere has noticed that. I am grateful for this opportunity to respond to his points.

The specific action that we are discussing is the clearance of rhododendron bushes from part of Whitley park, which is owned by Elliotts Bricks. I recognise and sympathise greatly with the concerns of local people who walk the paths around Whitley park and have had to stand by and watch that happen. The before-and-after photographs that were given to me today illustrate starkly what happened during this bank holiday. Whether or not it was environmentally right to clear the rhododendron bushes, the way in which the company went about it clearly increased the sense of outrage and alienated the company from local communities.

From what my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said, this case seems to be part of an on-going pattern of behaviour by that company. It is extremely regrettable that it feels that it can behave in that way and continue to do so over a number of years. If a company takes such a confrontational attitude to what it likes to call land management, but for which others might have a different name, it is not surprising that its behaviour should draw crowds and cause trouble, as occurred at Whitley park at Easter. At the least, it is unwise and regrettable that the company decided to behave in such a way.

As my hon. Friend said, we are told that the landowners of Whitley park are carrying out the work as part of

"a comprehensive whole farm plan".

The name derives from an approach to land management that is supported by the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group which, as many hon. Members will know, provides valuable conservation advice to landowners, as it did to Elliotts Bricks on this occasion. It is no good, however, for a company to claim that it has a comprehensive whole farm plan if it decides to behave in such a confrontational manner.

Comprehensive whole farm plans exist, and advice was given to the company, but I do not endorse the way in which it subsequently went about its work or the provocative and confrontational way in which it set out to achieve its aims. As my hon. Friend acknowledged, rhododendrons are regarded as an invasive weed that may suppress natural tree regeneration. Rhododendron control is acceptable, but not in the way that Elliotts Bricks went about it.

My hon. Friend raised a number of questions, which I shall try to answer. He mentioned hedgerows regulations which came into force on 1 June. He will know that we had some serious problems with the approach to hedgerows taken by the previous

[Angela Eagle]

Government. Although the regulations are an important first step in the protection of hedgerows, we have made it clear that we consider that they are too weak. That is why my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced an immediate review of the regulations, to consider how they might be strengthened.

Given that the focus of the regulations is on hedgerows and not on other forms of vegetation or boundaries, I regret that I cannot give my hon. Friend comfort that the review will yield changes to prevent a recurrence of the events at Whitley park, but it shows the Government's commitment to stronger environmental protection.

My hon. Friend referred to a ruling by Lord Denning on the scope of tree preservation orders. We are aware of one case in the 1970s where Lord Denning considered the question of what exactly in a woodland is protected by a tree preservation order. I am afraid that Lord Denning's ruling does not provide comfort for my hon. Friend—indeed, precisely the opposite. It recognised that protection extends only to trees in a wood, and went on to suggest that many saplings should not be regarded as trees, because, in a woodland, only trees of more than 7 or 8 in in diameter should be protected. That restrictive view was not applied by the courts in a subsequent case, but the courts have clearly established that tree preservation orders control the removal of trees only.

The local authority's tree preservation order in this case does not extend to all the trees in the wood, but only to certain groups of trees. This category is used for trees whose overall impact and quality merit protection. The tree preservation order must show the boundary of the group and must specify the number of trees included in it. The order is precise, and only specific trees are subject to its requirements. It does not apply to any trees or bushes that happen to be in the area shown in the plan that forms part of the order.

Although rhododendrons were removed from the area delineated in the tree preservation order, my understanding is that no work had been undertaken on the protected trees, so the requirements of the order were not contravened. I shall, however, ensure that when considering any future changes to tree preservation legislation, we take full account of the events at Whitley park.

My hon. Friend invited my views on the relevance of the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to what happened at Whitley park. As he observed, section 1 of the 1981 Act makes it an offence intentionally to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird, while the nest is in use or being built. For the species of bird that are specifically protected under the 1981 Act by their listing in schedule 1, it is an offence intentionally to disturb the birds while they are building a nest or while the nests contain eggs or young.

Mr. Sheerman: Is that list constantly updated? We hear from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds that birds that, only a few years ago, were considered a common species, such as the tree sparrow, are now an endangered species.

Angela Eagle: The health or otherwise of many bird species is changing constantly, so I shall check the facts and write to my hon. Friend on the matter. It would not be helpful if there were no updating mechanism.

My Department, in co-operation with the police, has raised the profile of wildlife crime and will continue to do so. Every police force in England now has a wildlife liaison officer who specialises in dealing with that activity. To aid those officers and others who deal with wildlife crime, the Department recently published a book, "Wildlife crime—a guide to law enforcement in the conservation and protection of wildlife in the United Kingdom". It is a practical guide to those involved in investigating offences under wildlife legislation.

We shall continue to keep the situation under review and ensure that the experience at Whitley park informs future consideration of the matter. My hon. Friends will realise that to change legislation requires slots in an already tight legislative timetable for the new Government. They may rest assured that my Department will continue to press for changes in legislation in these areas to be given a reasonable place in the queue over the five-year term of this Parliament.

I understand that one of the concerns underlying recent events at Whitley park arises from anxiety about the owners' future intentions towards the site, especially proposals for the opencasting of clay. The issue is not merely the company's confrontational and provocative attitude and its unwillingness to enter into a dialogue with local communities, but the communities' concerns about its future intentions with respect to opencasting which, as we all know, can cause terrible environmental damage if it is not properly regulated.

At the public inquiry, Elliotts Bricks argued for policies to be included in the draft Kirklees unitary development plan to allow brick earth mineral development at Whitley park. The inspector's report of that inquiry and his conclusions are awaited. It is expected that they will be presented to my Department in the autumn.

In the meantime, there are a number of old minerals planning permissions that apply to the Whitley park site, and Elliotts Bricks has applied to Kirklees council to resume clay extraction from five or so sites in the general area. All old mineral permissions must be reviewed by the mineral planning authority under the provisions of the Environment Act 1995. Clearly, the process has been set in hand by Kirklees council.

I understand that the council has refused to put a number of the Elliotts Bricks sites on its list of sites to be reviewed because it has doubts about the validity of the applications. The company has appealed to the Secretary of State against three of those decisions relating to the Houses Hill, Spa Green Quarry and Temple Grange Moor sites. The appeals are very recent and have been received in the Department only in the past few weeks.

The determination of the appeal will be made by one of my Department's inspectors and will be factually based on whether a relevant planning permission exists or not. The judgment is simply: is there an old permission to mine minerals from the site, or not?

When an appeal is lodged with the Department, Ministers have a legal responsibility to all parties involved. I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate, therefore, that I cannot comment further on the particular circumstances of those cases. However, my information is that none of the applications and appeals relates directly to those parts of the park from which the rhododendrons were cleared.

The events at Whitley park and the public reaction to them demonstrate the importance that we all attach to our local environment. My hon. Friend has highlighted the way in which mechanisms that are intended to preserve and enhance the quality of the local environment have proved inadequate in the circumstances of this particular case.

The announcement of the immediate review of the hedgerows regulations demonstrates the Government's commitment to strong environmental protection. We will keep relevant legislation under review, and I can assure my hon. Friend that, in considering any future changes, we will take account of what happened at Whitley park. I appeal to companies to play their part by not behaving in such a provocative and confrontational way. Instead, I hope that they will seek to build an open and constructive relationship and dialogue with their local communities.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Sitting suspended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 10 (Wednesday sittings), till half-past Two o'clock.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Local Government

1. **Mr. Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans the Government have to extend democratic local government in Northern Ireland and reduce the number of quangos. [1376]

6. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to extend the powers of district councils; and if she will make a statement. [1383]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Paul Murphy): The multi-party talks, which resumed on 3 June, are meant to achieve new local democratic arrangements for Northern Ireland as part of a wider political settlement. We have no plans to extend the powers of district councils in Northern Ireland, but Ministers will be visiting district councils in the coming months to listen to their views. I intend to consult widely with local interests in Northern Ireland during our current review of spending priorities, for example. The Government are reviewing quangos, and we shall examine the Northern Ireland situation in that context.

Mr. Thompson: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to the Front Bench. We have listened to that answer for 25 years. Is there really any need to wait for some political settlement in Northern Ireland before we return to proper local government in the Province?

Mr. Murphy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his good wishes. I remind the House that he and I were members of local authorities. I am sure that he agrees that local government is a cornerstone of good local democracy and of democracy generally. I cannot answer for the past 25 years, but if the talks that are currently occurring in Belfast result in a proper, balanced settlement and arrangements, I hope that we will not have to wait too long to see a proper system of local government that is accountable to all and accepted on both sides. We must understand that that outcome depends on the success or otherwise of those very important talks.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. I wish him and the rest of the Northern Ireland team well in their endeavours to bring peace to Northern Ireland. On the efforts to improve local government facilities and responsibilities, will my hon. Friend consider the serious issue of arrangements for strategic planning in Northern Ireland when he meets district council representatives? People highlighted that issue for discussion when I was in the Province. I appeal to my hon. Friend to consider favourably any representations made to him regarding planning issues.

Mr. Murphy: I thank my hon. Friend for his good wishes. He has taken a long-standing interest in planning matters both as a Member of Parliament and as a former leader of a local authority. He will know that the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs reported last year on planning. The Government have agreed to improve the consultative process and to give members of local authorities a more meaningful role in planning. However, I repeat that that can be achieved only in a proper spirit of partnership, which is possible only when there is widespread agreement on both sides of the community about a proper settlement in Northern Ireland.

Fair Employment Legislation

2. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to review legislation relating to fair employment in Northern Ireland. [1377]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): The previous Secretary of State asked the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights to carry out a review of employment equality, including the effectiveness of the current fair employment legislation. The commission will publish its report shortly and any recommendations made will be given the fullest consideration. The Government greatly appreciate the efforts SACHR has made to produce a comprehensive report which will inform our future thinking in this important area of policy.

Mr. Connarty: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and welcome him to the Government Front Bench in a very important Department of this Parliament. I am sure that everyone who cares for the people of Northern Ireland will look forward to the publication of the report with intense interest. In particular, those concerned will be interested to find out what penetration there was of prosperity in Northern Ireland in different communities during the period of the ceasefire. Will my hon. Friend give me an assurance that the fair employment review will attempt to find ways of bringing employment and prosperity to those communities that are at this moment suffering from endemic unemployment problems, whether we are talking of the Shankill road or the Falls road; Caulside in Antrim or the Bogside in Derry?

Mr. Ingram: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. I know that he has shown a close and active interest in this subject; that interest is more than welcome. The more people, including politicians, from the mainland who participate in Northern Ireland affairs, the better it is for us all.

I am sure that my hon. Friend understands that his question turns on a complex issue that I expect will be touched upon by the fair employment review. My hon. Friend will be aware that all Government employment agencies have a commitment to target their activities on areas of social need in line with the policy appraisal and fair treatment guidelines.

Mr. Roy Beggs: In welcoming the Secretary of State and her ministerial team to the Northern Ireland Department, may I observe that it is with regret that neither Northern Ireland Members nor Ministers are able to welcome Her Majesty at the garden party in Northern Ireland? I hope that the business managers will take some account of that and ensure that such a clash does not happen in future.

We seek to promote fair employment in Northern Ireland. Does the Minister accept that public bodies and the private sector, through the appointment of recruitment

officers and monitoring officers, have gone a long way to ensure fair employment and that appointments are made on merit? Will the Minister examine and publish the cost to the public sector over the past five years of out-of-court settlements following allegations of discrimination?

Will the Minister also—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."]—will the Minister seek to establish within the civil service expert legal advice to ensure that most allegations of discrimination are challenged and that justice is being done? Will he especially monitor the Newry and Mourne health trust—

Madam Speaker: Order. Questions are becoming far too long. I have complained that answers are long but now questions are turning into Adjournment debates.

Mr. Beggs: Finally—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hooray."]—will the Minister monitor the situation in the Newry and Mourne health trust, where only two of the 80 midwives are Protestants?

Mr. Ingram: The conflict between Northern Ireland questions and the garden party is a matter of regret. It is something which will have to be taken on board for the future.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of matters and I do not think that you, Madam Speaker, would allow me to deal with them in detail. Perhaps I may write to him on some of the specific issues he raises and place my answers in the Library—if answers are available. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will share with me the view that there is a need for a proper overview of fair employment policy in Northern Ireland so that all sectors of the community benefit from it.

Mr. McGrady: I, too, welcome the Minister to the Government Front Bench.

In the context of fair employment, does the Minister accept the principle that fair employment opportunity is as much a matter of geographical location of industry as of individual application? Perhaps he will look into his new portfolio from the point of view that areas of high unemployment, such as my constituency, have not had one inward investment job in the past decade. Some Government Departments have hampered the introduction of such jobs. The planning department, for example, has sat on the report of an inquiry into an industrial site for the past three months even though it had ample opportunity at the public inquiry to make its comments. In that context, fair employment cannot be provided unless jobs are distributed equally.

Mr. Ingram: The hon. Gentleman will understand that the distribution of jobs is not only a matter for the best efforts of the Government; it is also determined by those who invest in particular areas. It is for them to decide where to make their investments. I said earlier that the function and underlying purpose of all Government agencies is to target areas of social need and to seek answers to the very points that the hon. Gentleman made. I have asked my officials to draw up a programme for me to visit all areas in Northern Ireland so that I can begin to understand some of the local economic development issues that are involved. That will take longer that many hon. Members may be prepared to wait, but I shall do my best, and as quickly as possible.

Peace Process

3. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the Northern Ireland peace process. [1378]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): The multi-party negotiations resumed on 3 June. The Prime Minister has made it clear that the Government are determined to work towards a comprehensive and lasting political settlement that has the broad support of all parts of the community in Northern Ireland.

I said recently that we want the talks to move on to consider the substantive political issue of decommissioning illegal weapons within a matter of weeks. I have also said that we want Sinn Fein to join the negotiations, but have made it clear that that can happen only if there is an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire and a clear commitment to democratic principles.

Judy Mallaber: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and congratulate her on her excellent start in what we all know is a very difficult job.

Is my right hon. Friend aware of the view, shared by many hon. Members, that progress in the talks has been slow and that the credibility of the process will be greatly enhanced if early progress can be made? Will she therefore tell us when she thinks we will enter into full political negotiations?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for her question. I think that the talks are in danger of running into the sands and that progress must be made as soon as possible. We are working closely with the Irish Government and the parties to try to see whether we can get the issue of the decommissioning of illegal weapons settled in the next couple of weeks, which would allow us to move on to substantive negotiations in the talks in September. We have also made it clear that, by legislation of the House, the life of the Forum, which runs parallel to the talks, comes to an end in May 1998. That is the time that we are working towards for a settlement and a final vote in a referendum.

Mr. Trimble: I welcome the right hon. Lady to the Dispatch Box and wish her well in the job that is in front of her. I also remind her that when the Prime Minister made his speech in Belfast he also said that he would not allow Sinn Fein to hold a veto over the talks and that he was encouraging or permitting his officials to speak to Sinn Fein purely for the purpose of explaining to them that it was their last chance to join the process, otherwise the process would move on. In a situation where, yesterday, republicans attempted to murder soldiers; where, this morning, republicans murdered a person in Belfast; and where there can be no doubt about the absence of any commitment to peaceful means among republicans, the only coherent thing to do is to go ahead with the process without Sinn Fein. The Government are in danger of losing credibility with the people of Northern Ireland if they keep on talking to republicans against a background of republican violence.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his good wishes. In answer to his question, I condemn the

violence that has taken place in the past three days. It is appalling wherever it comes from. I do not know whether the origins of the violence are yet clear, but it should be totally condemned regardless of that.

Let me make it clear to the House that the Prime Minister said that we should have clarificatory talks between officials and Sinn Fein. We are not talking to Sinn Fein until there is an unequivocal ceasefire, when—if—that comes, but it is important to understand that these are not parallel negotiations; they are not negotiations in any way at all.

We have had two meetings to clarify our position and that of Sinn Fein. We have no intention of going on indefinitely. I said yesterday that I am minded to have one more meeting in order to determine the two positions, and I believe that yesterday Sinn Fein approached the Northern Ireland Office for another meeting. Therefore, my best answer is that another meeting is likely, but that that will be it.

Mr. Hume: I join the rest of the House in welcoming the Secretary of State and her team. We look forward to working with them on all aspects of our problem. I also welcome and thank the right hon. Lady for the statement that she has just made about the peace process. I can tell the House from my own experience that an historic opportunity now exists to take the gun for ever out of our island politics and I encourage the right hon. Lady to keep on the road that she has clearly declared because the process that will bring that about is and must be a process that threatens no section of our people. Lasting stability and lasting peace must have the loyalty and allegiance of both sections of our people—something which has never existed in Northern Ireland. The opportunity now exists and I thank the right hon. Lady for the efforts that she and her team are making.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for those kind words. Perhaps I may return the compliment to him and other Northern Ireland Members. However much we try to facilitate and set the parameters, in the end, as the hon. Gentleman rightly points out, progress can be made only with the consent, the support and the accommodation of the two communities. Where trust and confidence is built between them, together we have a chance of stopping the violence in Northern Ireland. My thanks go to all the parties in Northern Ireland. Whether it be on decommissioning or on concluding the talks by May 1998, we can put forward suggestions, but accommodation requires the agreement of the different parties from Northern Ireland in the House. The settlement will, in the end, be theirs. We will do all we can, and we wish them well on the path to reaching an accommodation with which we can all live.

Mr. Ancram: I wish the right hon. Lady well, but does she accept that the situation on the ground is very sensitive at the moment, not least because of the recent acts of violence on both sides of the community which must be whole-heartedly condemned? In calling for calm and restraint in the face of what is undoubtedly despicable violence, will she reconfirm clearly that it remains the Government's policy to move forward only on the basis of dialogue and agreement with the parties, not by imposition, and that she will look to the new Irish Government to show the same sensitivity to the concerns of both parts of the community as she herself must?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for those remarks. Let me pick up where he ended. Of course we will represent the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland. That is the job that we are here to do. I have listened to his remarks about the Irish Government. They are doing their best in a difficult situation to try to continue the discussion on decommissioning, which would be helpful to move the process forward. I can only agree that progress will be by dialogue and discussion between all the parties. Of course we will not impose an agreement or a settlement. We have never, ever suggested that. We supported the Downing street declaration and the framework document, which makes it absolutely clear—it is the cornerstone of our policy—that consent is crucial to agreement and accommodation in Northern Ireland. It is only with the consent of the different communities that any settlement that will last and can be lived with will work. In that sense, the answer to the first part of the right hon. Gentleman's question is a categorical yes.

Mr. Robert McCartney: I add my welcome to the Secretary of State in her new responsibilities. It is perhaps a sign of creeping democracy in Northern Ireland that her team includes a Scot and a Welshman. That may augur well for the future. Is the Secretary of State aware that, in her responses to various questions, she used the terms "unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire" and "an unequivocal ceasefire" as if they were interchangeable? Is she aware that the ground rules provide for an unequivocal restoration of the failed and tactical ceasefire of August 1994? That ceasefire proved not only fallible but fraudulent. Are the Government wedded to a restoration of such a ceasefire, or must a new ceasefire be complete in its nature, permanent in its duration and universal in its application?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for his question and for his good wishes to me and my team. I wonder what the fourth person is: perhaps he is stateless. On numerous occasions since coming to office, the Government have outlined the need for an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire. We have also said that that must be confirmed by words and deeds. Our position has not shifted. I have also said that if and when we achieve a ceasefire it will be judged in the round: we will make a judgment on all the conditions at that point. It is not up to us any more: we have made it clear that the ball is in Sinn Fein's court. If progress is to be achieved to make the talks inclusive, it is up to Sinn Fein to make a move.

Parades

4. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to take steps to address the difficulties in respect of parades in Northern Ireland. [1381]

8. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to help reduce tensions over parades in Northern Ireland. [1385]

Marjorie Mowlam: We have met a number of residents' groups and parades organisers. There is

absolutely no doubt that none of them wants a repeat of what happened at Drumcree last year. The main purpose of the meetings was to listen to all sides and promote the message that the key to resolving the parade issue is accommodation and negotiation. It is only by accommodation and negotiation locally that we shall progress on this issue to avoid the disastrous situation that we had last year. The Government are committed to implementation of the recommendations in the North report on parades, and will introduce legislation in the autumn to achieve that.

Mr. Stott: I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on becoming Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. As someone who has been there before, I wish her well in her difficult task. My right hon. Friend may be aware that some Labour Members met the Grand Master of the Orange Lodge in the House of Commons last week. He said that the Orange Order in Portadown had circulated a letter to every resident in the Garvaghy road explaining the nature and origin of the Orange Order match. Will she tell the House whether she believes that the contents of that letter, which explained what the march is about, will go any way towards avoiding the disgraceful and appalling scenes that we saw in Drumcree last year?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. The letter to which he referred, which the Orange Order sent to all the residents of the Garvaghy road, was a positive step. It was helpful to outline its position. It is also helpful that the Garvaghy road residents have reciprocated with a letter, because part of the problem is a misunderstanding and lack of information. What the Orange Order has done is a positive step and a positive statement. However, an agreement is no closer after that exchange of letters. We shall, therefore, intensify our efforts and leave no stone unturned to try to avoid a repeat of the events of last year. The only way to avoid violence and the conflict that we saw last year is through discussion and accommodation between the two communities locally. We shall continue to talk to both sides to achieve that, but, in the end, it is in the hands of local people. I am sure that all constitutional politicians in the House will use their power to try to avoid a repeat of those events.

Mr. Borrow: I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments. In her main reply, she answered any question that I might have asked as a supplementary. I refer in particular to her welcome for the letters from the Orange Order to the residents of Portadown, and her view that those were helpful, and to the fact that she said that further discussions should take place to bring about a satisfactory solution that would avoid the appalling consequences of the march last year.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank my hon. Friend for those comments. I simply reiterate the fact that many people, including the Churches, the voluntary sector and the business community, are working in good faith to try to achieve an accommodation. I am sure that in the next three to six weeks everybody will do all they can in Northern Ireland, where the vast majority of the people do not want a repeat of what happened in the Garvaghy road.

Mr. William Ross: Is it not a fact that lawful processions have been stopped only because of the threats of violence, which had force only because they were backed up by the IRA? Is it not a further fact that, because those threats had such force behind them, the streets were surrendered to the control of the IRA both last year and the year before? What steps does the Secretary of State intend to take to regain and maintain control of the streets this year? Despite what she says, the IRA is intent on ensuring that there is confrontation and violence, and it can bring that about.

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question, and repeat that, from our perspective, we shall work with the Royal Ulster Constabulary and, if necessary, the Army, so that the ports and airports are not closed when attempts are made to close them, as happened last year, but, in the end, I do not want to see RUC people caught, as they were at the weekend, when 27 of them were injured. They are often caught in the middle, and we must do all we can to support them.

I hope that, in the end, both communities will realise that what we have is a situation of conflicting rights. There is the right to march and parade, which I fully accept, but equally there is a second right—the right to live in freedom, without fear and intimidation. We must reach an accommodation between those conflicting rights in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Mallon: I, too, add my voice to the welcome for the Secretary of State and her Ministers. The right hon. Lady will be aware that during and after parades and marches last year, 8,500 plastic bullets were fired. Is she aware of the deep concern about the use of those lethal weapons? Because of that concern, will she inform the House when the then Northern Ireland Ministers knew that a faulty batch was being used, when the Royal Ulster Constabulary knew that it was firing faulty plastic bullets and, above all, when the Northern Ireland police authority knew faulty weapons were being discharged during that period?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question, and acknowledge to the House the efforts that he has made on that and other issues. As he points out, the issue causes distress to sections of the community; I know it also caused distress to the RUC when its personnel found out that they had been using equipment that was not up to specification.

I shall respond to the hon. Gentleman's three specific questions. As for the Northern Ireland Office and the RUC, I think that the RUC knew on 26 March this year and the Government knew at the beginning of April. I do not know the answer to his question about the police authority, but I shall let the hon. Gentleman know.

Mr. Hunter: How can negotiations be held about the marches when Sinn Fein places convicted republican terrorists on residents' groups? If the two Governments—rightly—will not hold discussions with the Provisionals this side of a ceasefire, why should others?

Marjorie Mowlam: I did not hear the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's question. Will he repeat it?

Madam Speaker: It would be a good idea if hon. Members did not cheer the party leaders as they come in. As I have said before, it is time consuming.

Mr. Hunter: If Sinn Fein places convicted terrorists on residents' groups, how can there be negotiations? The two Governments—rightly—will not talk with Sinn Fein. Is not it unreasonable to expect others to do so?

Marjorie Mowlam: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. Residents' groups in areas where there have

been difficulties with parades contain a broad mixture of people. He is absolutely right that some are ex-convicts, but that applies to groups representing both sides of the community. I take the point that some people do not want to talk to Sinn Fein members, and we are trying to find ways around that if possible. Whatever the origins or backgrounds of the individuals in residents' groups, there is no doubt that they express the wishes of the nationalist communities in their areas. We have talked to them in great detail, and they represent the nationalists' fears. We must listen to the fears and demands of both communities.

Madam Speaker: I hope that the House and Ministers will note that we have dealt with only six questions on the Order Paper today. That is unsatisfactory.

PRIME MINISTER

Ministerial Visit

Q1. **Mr. Pearson:** To ask the Prime Minister when he plans next to visit Dudley. [1406]

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I have no immediate plans to visit Dudley, but I did so on the occasion of my hon. Friend's magnificent by-election victory. I am delighted that he held the seat at the general election. He will know that I am due to visit the west midlands on Friday.

Mr. Pearson: Will my right hon. Friend spare some time to visit Wordsley hospital's recently built maternity unit—where both my daughters were born—which is scheduled to be bulldozed as part of the local NHS trust's proposed capital investment plan? Will he talk to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health about urgently reviewing the plan so that we can have a successful private finance initiative project that meets the wishes and needs of local people in Dudley and build an NHS of which we can all feel proud once again?

The Prime Minister: If I may, I shall just point out to Opposition Members that they promised but never delivered a single project. A little humility on their part might be a good idea. In relation to the PFI, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has announced a review, which will enable us to get the work done quicker and better than under the previous Administration. My hon. Friend will know of the two problems left by the resounding incompetence of the previous Administration: first, no PFI contract was delivered; and, secondly, vast sums of money were spent on bureaucracy in the NHS, rather than on patient care. I am pleased to say that both will be dealt with, and a review of the Dudley service will be a part of my right hon. Friend's review.

Engagements

Q2. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 11 June. [1407]

The Prime Minister: I had a meeting today with Transport Commissioner, Mr. Neil Kinnock. Later today, I will go to France for a meeting with President Chirac. In addition, I have had meetings with Cabinet colleagues.

Mr. Burstow: Will the Prime Minister consider, in national carers week, that the only way in which the Government can make a difference to Britain's 6.8 million carers is by providing the additional resources necessary to implement fully both the spirit and the letter of the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995? If the Government do not deliver on that, all they will be offering is tea and sympathy.

The Prime Minister: I would like to pay tribute to the enormous amount of work done by the almost 7 million carers in this country. They do it in circumstances of great difficulty and often of genuine hardship. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act was promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks). We are, of course, committed to implementing it.

It is extremely important, if we are to put caring on a proper basis for the long term, that there be the right co-operation between community care services and local health services. That is something which we are also committed to doing. Of course, we have to work within the available resources, but we will none the less make substantial progress on the Act.

Mr. Connarty: The Prime Minister may have noted last week that the Securities and Investments Board instructed one major pensions company to retrain its whole work force because they are still mis-selling pensions. Can he assure the House and the country that the Government will ensure that people who are mis-sold pensions will be fully compensated for what is essentially an abuse of a position of trust by the pensions companies?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that issue. About 600,000 people have been mis-sold pensions. It is an absolute scandal, and one which we are determined to put right. My hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has already agreed to bring together the various pensions groups to consider how the situation can be put right. It is important that people should be given proper compensation. In advance of the meeting, we cannot detail the specific recommendations that will be made, but we are considering the problem urgently. We have acted on it with considerable speed after coming to power, and we will act on it further as soon as we can.

Q3. **Mr. Spring:** Given the immense importance of the American air force presence at Mildenhall and Lakenheath, is the Prime Minister aware of the anger and anxiety in my constituency following calls by local Labour councillors for the bases' closure? Will he take this opportunity to condemn those anti-American sentiments and will he institute whatever is required within his party to put a stop at once to damaging anti-NATO activities? [1408]

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of the comments to which the hon. Gentleman adverts, but, as he should know, we are strong supporters of both the alliance with America and NATO, and it is absolutely clear that there is no question of the bases being closed. The Labour party in government has done an extremely good job in securing a good future for the transatlantic alliance that we hold dear.

Mr. Corbett: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it is his Government's intention to ensure that before this Parliament is over people with disabilities enjoy the same civil rights as the rest of us?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend points out, we are of course committed to making sure that those who are disabled get proper civil rights. We have made that clear all the way through. I pay tribute to the work that he and many of my hon. Friends have done in trying to promote disabled people's rights.

When the measures in the United States were introduced, there were great shouts that they would put companies out of business, that people would not be able to cope and that the cost burden would be too great. In fact, business has gained as a result of the introduction of those measures. It is precisely because we believe that disabled people have a good and genuine role in our society that we are committed to the rights that my hon. Friend describes.

Mr. Heseltine: During the election campaign, the Labour party's spokesman on schools, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), gave an assurance that children with assisted places which go up to the age of 13 would be able to keep those places when the scheme was abolished. Will the Prime Minister confirm that that is the policy of Her Majesty's Government?

The Prime Minister: Yes, the right hon. Gentleman is quite right to raise this, and I hope that my answer will give him some satisfaction. The position, as he knows, is that the vast majority of children on the assisted places scheme are there for secondary education between the ages of 11 and 18. He will know also that prior to the general election his Government also introduced assisted places for those in primary schools. In respect of those children in primary schools up to the age of 11, there is under the Bill an automatic right for assisted places to continue all the way through the schooling. In respect of those between the ages of 11 and 13, there is a discretion on the part of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment. The Secretary of State has already made it clear that those between the ages of 11 and 13, where the normal school leaving age in that area is—exceptionally—12 or 13, will be protected as well. He has also made it clear that school children between the ages of 10 to 13 in the middle schools will also be protected. In respect of the subject matter that was raised in the debate last night—those children that come in aged four or five—the Secretary of State will make it clear today that he will exercise his discretion in respect of those children, provided that they have been given a promise or an understanding that their assisted place will go all the way through to 13.

Mr. Heseltine: The Prime Minister has outlined a range of discretion in respect of the powers of the Secretary of State for Education and Employment for children between the ages of 11 and 13. During the election campaign, a letter was written by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), the then shadow Minister for Schools, in which he said:

"If a child has a place at a school which runs to age 13, then that place will be honoured through to 13."

There was no reference to discretion: it was a right.

The Prime Minister: Let me explain to the right hon. Gentleman why it is necessary to have a discretion. In respect of those children who have been given a promise or an understanding that they will go through to the age of 13, that—as was indicated by the letter—must be honoured, but there may be children who were not given a promise or understanding. It is important, to prevent abuse of the system, that we do not end up with taxpayers' money being spent subsidising private school fees for children between the ages of 11 and 13, when no such promise or understanding was given to the parents. In respect, however, of those children for whom an assurance was given, that assurance will be honoured.

Mr. Heseltine: The fact of the matter is that no question of discretion was mentioned during the election campaign. A quite specific commitment was given and the Government are reneging on that commitment. The fact is that last week the Prime Minister did not know the difference between a Bill and a White Paper: this year he does not know the difference between the ages of 11 and 13. Everyone will remember that in the election he said that they would honour their specific pledges or they would not be trusted. Already, it is obvious that this Government cannot be trusted.

The Prime Minister: All I can say to the right hon. Gentleman is that if that was a late leadership bid, I think it will be unsuccessful. If I can put him right, I have made it clear that the assurance that has been given will be honoured. It is important that there is a discretionary element, because we must avoid abuse of the system. If no promise had been given that the schooling would extend to 13, it would mean that two years' worth of taxpayers' money was being given to a child when no such assurance had been given. Let me explain why this is necessary to Conservative Members, who have attempted—I do not say in respect of this, but in respect of other things—to delay this legislation as much as they possibly can. It is necessary because people should have a perfect right to send their children to private schools if they wish, but taxpayers' money should not be used to subsidise that. Taxpayers' money should be used for the state education system. We will use that money to cut class sizes for the five, six and seven-year-olds in our state education system. I believe that the Conservatives' refusal to understand the importance of that is yet another reason why they lost the election.

Mrs. Heal: Could my right hon. Friend tell me the answer to the sum 203 minus 5? Is he aware that half the nine-year-olds in England are unable to do that sum and that a recent survey revealed that we lie tenth out of 17 countries? What will his Government do to ensure that basic literacy is not an optional extra for our school children?

Hon. Members: Answer.

The Prime Minister: I feel as if the shadow of Dan Quayle is standing over me. Of course, my hon. Friend and I both know the answer, so there is no need to say it.

Mr. Skinner: The Tories only add up to 164.

The Prime Minister: But can they count? That is the point. We have of course taken action on literacy and

numeracy as one of the Government's first priorities. I feel that prioritising those areas is the right thing for our Government to do. Many things should be changed in the primary school—and, indeed, the secondary school—education system, but there is no greater priority than getting basic literacy and numeracy skills right. We have set rigorous targets for that and we intend to meet those targets. Again, if we carry that through—and I believe that we shall—we will have done something very substantial not only for individual children but for the whole future economic and social prosperity of our nation.

Q4. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** Does the Prime Minister agree with his colleagues both past and present who signed the Claim of Right based on the sovereignty of the Scottish people or does he, as was widely reported before the general election, still believe that sovereignty rests with him as an English Member of Parliament? [1410]

The Prime Minister: The simple fact is, as, indeed, the Constitutional Convention accepted, that ultimate sovereignty rests with the Westminster Parliament. Of course that is so.

Mrs. Ewing: No.

The Prime Minister: Well, it is actually there in the Constitutional Convention. In respect of the Claim of Right and sovereignty of the Scottish people, what could be better than giving them the sovereign right to decide in a referendum whether they want a Scottish Parliament? That is surely the sensible way to proceed. Having watched the debate with considerable interest over the past few months, I believe that the vast majority of people in Scotland, including the constituents of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie), are less interested in those types of constitutional intricacy than they are in seeing how the Scottish Parliament delivers better health, better education, better law and order services to the people. If we all concentrated on that, we would get a long way.

Mr. Barnes: At the general election, Labour stood on a programme on opencast mining that contained 10 points. What progress has been made on that? It is of vast importance to many of our constituents.

The Prime Minister: I cannot off the top of my head tell my hon. Friend exactly what progress has been made. He will know that, in his area, it is a major issue. It is in my constituency, too. If he will allow me, I shall ensure that I write to him to say exactly what progress has been made on the points that he raises.

Q5. **Mr. Flight:** I am sure that the Prime Minister will be aware that the majority of shares in the privatised utilities are owned by pension funds or pensioners. Will he assure the House that, as the previous Government provided compensation to pensioners who suffered from the increase in VAT on fuel, the Government will provide compensation to pensioners and pension funds that suffer a loss of value in their savings and investments as a result of the windfall tax? [1411]

The Prime Minister: Rather than compensating them for having put VAT on fuel, the previous Government, whom no doubt the hon. Gentleman would have supported, should never have put it on in the first place. As for pension funds and the windfall tax, I really do not know how anyone looking at the results of the companies over the past few weeks can doubt the wisdom and basic fairness of a windfall tax. It is the right, fair way to put in place a jobs and education programme for our young people that is desperately needed in many parts of the country. I should tell the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends on the Conservative Benches that we were elected on that mandate. That was the promise we made and, unlike the previous Government, we will carry through our promise.

Mr. Linton: In carrying out his programme of constitutional reforms, will the Prime Minister consider laying down at least minimum standards of democracy for the election of the Leader of the Opposition?

Madam Speaker: Order. Questions must be asked of the Prime Minister for which he has a responsibility.

Mr. Linton: Will my right hon. Friend introduce minimum standards of democracy for all elections that affect the conduct of the House? As the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) won the first ballot with 49 votes, whereas my right hon. Friend, when elected Leader of the Opposition, won 508,000 votes at the same stage—more than 10,000 times more—will he also consult the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague)—

Madam Speaker: Order. I am tolerant of new Members, but let me make the matter clear so that everyone is aware. Let us have a seminar for just one moment. Questions must be asked of the Prime Minister for which he has responsibility. He has no responsibility for what happens on the Conservative Benches. I now call Mr. Ashdown, who I am sure has a very good question for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Ashdown: As always, Madam Speaker, as always.

At the election, the Labour party said that it would retain for two years, if I recall correctly, not only the Conservative Government's overall spending plans, but even the individual departmental budget ceilings. Is that still Government policy?

The Prime Minister: The position is precisely as we outlined it during the election campaign. The comprehensive spending review will be announced at 3.30 pm today. The purpose of that is simply to ensure that we get the best value for money for the spending plans that are put through.

In all honesty, we have inherited a national debt that doubled under the previous Administration. This year, we will pay out in interest payments on the debt that they ran up more than we spend on law and order or defence. For that very reason, we have to make absolutely sure that we keep a tight rein on public spending.

Mr. Ashdown: The departmental spending review may well commit the Government to maintaining that two-year ban in terms of the overall total and the individual budget ceilings. The Government know that we think that it is

wrong that one cannot raise targeted taxes for targeted expenditure on education, but urely it must be plain dotty that savings cannot be transferred from one Department to another. The effect of that, as the Prime Minister must surely know, is to deepen the crisis in education.

Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that when he wrote the Labour manifesto for the election he made a commitment not to allow dogma to intrude into children's education? Do not the Government apparently intend to do precisely that?

The Prime Minister: I say, with the greatest respect, that I do not think that that is a substantial point.

The comprehensive spending review, which will be announced at 3.30 pm, is precisely designed to ensure that we get proper value for money. It is always possible to say that we should be spending more money on every single part of Government expenditure.

Mr. Kirkwood: He was not saying that.

The Prime Minister: He was. He said that he would have preferred targeted taxes to increase public spending. He stood for election on a programme that, perfectly honestly and perfectly rightly according to his views, called for tax rises in connection with virtually every aspect of Government expenditure.

We made a clear and specific pledge during the election, and we will carry it out. We have to do that in difficult financial circumstances—and that is the responsibility of Government—because the previous Administration got public finances into their current state. They did that despite North sea oil, the asset sales and all the rest of it. For that very reason, we have got to keep a tight rein on public spending. We will do that, but we will not do so dogmatically—of course not. For example, we will phase out the money on the assisted places and use it to reduce class sizes; for example, we will make sure that the windfall tax helps young people on training programmes; for example, we will cut national health service bureaucracy. That is precisely what I would call using public spending wisely and making sure that when we put a tax in place, it is fair. That is what we have done.

Q7. **Mr. Home Robertson:** Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the wider effects of the division and inequality that we have inherited from the previous Administration? Will he consider the position of people on low incomes in this country? Surely it is bad enough that they have a low standard of living. Is it not worse still that a disproportionate number of them also suffer from bad health, which often leads to early death? After all the years of procrastination and neglect by the outgoing Administration—starting with the cover-up of the Black report on health and inequality in Britain in 1980—what will the new Labour Government do to make things better for people on low incomes? [1413]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to raise that concern. It is for that reason that the Secretary of State for Health has asked Sir Donald Acheson to conduct a further review into inequality and the link between wealth and health. It is important to do that because the Black report, which was commissioned by a Labour Government, was effectively buried by the last Conservative Government. These inequalities do matter and there is no doubt that the published statistics show a link between income, inequality and poor health. It is important to address that issue, and we are doing so. The purpose of the windfall tax is to address that matter on behalf of young people and the long-term unemployed. We are also addressing the issue by introducing the minimum wage, which will help those on low incomes, and with welfare measures, particularly those designed to get single parents back to work. [HON. MEMBERS: "Boring."] Conservative Members may shout, "Boring" but most people in this country want those issues to be tackled.

Mr. Alan Clark: Most people in this place would agree with the Prime Minister that an invited audience is more congenial than any other sort. We are an elected body of representatives. What are we to infer from the fact that the Prime Minister has halved the number of occasions on which he comes to the Chamber to answer questions and instead goes round the country to speak to hand-picked audiences selected by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) at supposed question-and-answer sessions?

The Prime Minister: There is precisely the same amount of time for Prime Minister's questions. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House is setting up a Select Committee to look at the procedures of the House and related issues. Politicians should go round the country and talk to the public more often. It is important that members of the public, as well as Members of the House, get the chance to question the Prime Minister.

Q8. **Mr. Cousins:** Does the Prime Minister agree that the people and the Government of Britain owe a moral duty to the people of Hong Kong that will not end with the handover ceremony next month? [1414]

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is an important matter and I shall be attending the handover ceremony. I anticipate that the present Prime Minister of China will be there. We are committed to the Joint Declaration, which protects the rights of people in Hong Kong, and we shall do everything in our power to ensure that it is carried out. We have a considerable obligation to the 6.5 million people who live in Hong Kong. My hon. Friend will remember how, in the previous Parliament, we helped some of those people to obtain their proper rights of citizenship and passports precisely because of our concerns. I hope that my hon. Friend will understand from what I have said that we take those concerns and the interests of those people very seriously indeed. Although we wish to have good relations with China—they are important both for Hong Kong and for the British national interest—we want to ensure that the words of the Joint Declaration are carried out.

Q9. **Mrs. Ewing:** Will the Prime Minister—and, I hope, the House—join me in sending good wishes to the people of Eigg, who are this week celebrating the long-overdue community ownership of their island? When will there be a comprehensive reform of the feudal system of land tenure in Scotland—I mean reform, not review, which seems to be this Government's favourite word? [1415]

The Prime Minister: On the latter part of the hon. Lady's question, I can make no promises. I am, however, happy to send my good wishes to the people of Eigg and I hope they enjoy their celebration very much. Unfortunately, I shall not be there with them.

Q10. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** As we are to have a free vote on the use of handguns, does the Prime Minister accept that Parliament has a moral responsibility to support a ban on handguns and that we owe that responsibility particularly to the parents of Dunblane and to other parents who are concerned about their children? [1416]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend knows that that is to be the subject of debate later. We owe a moral responsibility to the victims of Dunblane and their families, which is why we have brought forward legislation on the matter. It is true that the last Government did a great deal in the banning of handguns, but we believe that all handguns should be banned. That is my personal belief. There will be a free vote on the issue and I shall personally support the proposed measures, because they are the right ones. We all remember the day of Dunblane and what happened there and we want to do everything in our power to make sure that it never happens again.

Spending Review

3.30 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): With permission, Madam Speaker, I should like to make a short statement about our approach to public spending in the medium term and to the comprehensive spending review promised in our manifesto.

We set out our spending plans for this year and next in our manifesto. We made it clear that tough decisions would be needed, but that such an approach was essential. We shall maintain that approach. This statement looks beyond the next two years to the medium term.

We will deliver prudent and sound management of the public finances to provide a stable platform for investment and growth; and we will ensure that public spending achieves the objectives that we have set ourselves—objectives which are based on our key principles of opportunity, fairness, employment and investment. To achieve that, we must put the public finances into proper shape.

Since 1990, public sector debt has almost doubled as a proportion of national output. In 1994, we were told there would be a Budget balance in 1998–99; in 1995, we were told it had slipped a year to 1999–2000; and last year, it slipped again to 2000–01. As a result, after five years of growth, we are still borrowing to cover our current spending: the current deficit was about £20 billion last year and the last Budget forecast that we would stay in deficit for the next two years, despite making some questionable assumptions. In order to rebuild public trust in the management of the public finances, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has asked the National Audit Office to review the forecasting assumptions he set out in the House on 20 May.

The public have a right to know not only that total spending is affordable and prudent, but that their money is being spent on their priorities, that it is being spent efficiently and that the spending is effective. The Government spend more than £300 billion, equivalent to over £5,000 a year for every man, woman and child in the country. We will reorder that £300 billion to meet our objectives, which were endorsed by the people on 1 May.

Public spending needs to be clearly focused, and we will achieve that objective. There is no better time for a root-and-branch reappraisal of public spending priorities than at the start of a new Government.

We showed the way when we were in opposition. We said that we would provide nursery places for all four-year-olds, and we will find the money by scrapping nursery vouchers. We promised to cut waiting lists in the national health service, and we will release the funds by releasing savings from red tape and bureaucracy. We promised to reduce class sizes for five, six, and seven-year-olds, and we will find the money to pay for it by abolishing the assisted places scheme.

We have already made a start in delivering those promises, within weeks of the election. We will continue this approach in government, stripping out ill-targeted programmes that benefit only the few, and redirecting spending towards the priorities of the many.

The comprehensive spending review I am announcing today will carry on that process. It will set out clear objectives for all Departments. It will examine how we can achieve our objectives of improving standards in education, modernising the welfare state and getting people into work—in short, delivering our manifesto commitments as efficiently and effectively as we can.

Every Department will scrutinise its spending plans in detail from a zero base, and ask, how does each item of spending contribute to the Government's objectives as set out in our manifesto? Why are we spending this money? Do we need to spend it? What is it achieving? How effective is it? How efficiently are we spending it?

Every objective will be costed and Departments' effectiveness in achieving them will be scrutinised. We will make sure that we know how much we are spending on each objective, and that we can demonstrate to the public what we have achieved as a result.

We will consider how best to provide services. What should be provided by the public sector, the private sector, or a combination of both in public and private partnerships? As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, what counts is what works.

As well as looking at spending in each Department separately, we will look at issues that cross departmental boundaries. Those cross-departmental reviews will ensure that we are not hidebound by the existing structure of government. The review will be co-ordinated by the ministerial committee on public expenditure, which will look at spending across Departments.

We will look in particular at Departments' efficiency in making the best use of their assets. We have asked Departments to draw up an inventory of their assets—something that no Government have ever achieved before. We need to know what the Government own, and whether they need those assets. If not, we shall reallocate the proceeds where they are needed most.

The review will be thorough and far reaching. All Departments and all Ministers will be involved. It will take 12 months to complete and its conclusions will inform a new set of public spending plans for the rest of this Parliament—a set that reflects our priorities and meets the country's needs beyond that. It will take the long-term view.

The review process is already under way. Terms of reference for the departmental reviews will be published shortly. The Government have already shown their determination to achieve their objectives. The comprehensive spending review will provide us with a clear sense of direction and the long-term view that every Government need. We will ensure that the Government spend public money wisely and fairly, so that public spending matches the people's priorities.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Is the Chief Secretary aware that we are always glad when he comes to the House to give us information about what the Government are doing? However, the Government already have a history of not coming to the House when they have serious policy announcements to make.

We were rather surprised that the right hon. Gentleman should come here with a rather platitudinous rewrite of a speech that the Chancellor made in January when in opposition, and that he should lift a little of the language that the Conservative Treasury team used over the past four years on efficiency and the best use of public money. He told us nothing in his statement.

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

The right hon. Gentleman wants a reaction to the only objectives he set. He said that his purposes are opportunity, fairness, employment and investment. Is he aware that we agree with all those purposes? I can think of no one, of any political view, who would not agree.

The right hon. Gentleman also said that the aim is to spend public money wisely. I dare to speak for the other political parties when I say that every hon. Member is in favour of spending public money wisely. Does he realise how incredible his statement is, coming from a party that opposed all the Conservative Government's public spending measures and which had uncosted public spending plans in its election manifesto, which it is plainly not yet able to address?

If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to tell the House something about the framework of the review, which was announced a long time ago, will he say whether he is still committed to our objective that public spending should be kept below 40 per cent. of national income? Is he committed to an objective where gross Government expenditure each year will grow less rapidly than growth of the economy as a whole? Is he, remarkably for a Labour Chief Secretary, intending to look for all opportunities to move public sector functions into the private sector which it can perform them more effectively and efficiently?

If the right hon. Gentleman cannot answer even those questions about a framework policy, we regard it as the beginning of a whole lot of smoke and mirrors—like the National Audit Office review of the Budget assumptions, preparing the way for moving away from strict control of public expenditure and equating it with the party's objectives.

Will the right hon. Gentleman answer some specific questions? Can we take it that the present definition of general Government expenditure will stand? Can we take it that the present definitions that underlie the private finance initiative stand, so that there will be no moving off the books expenditure that the Labour party wants to hide?

Will the present systems of accounting for European expenditure—the so-called Euro-PES system—remain intact under that arrangement? Can we have a reassurance about what are known as the Scottish and Welsh formulae—the territorial formulae that underlie the divisions between parts of the United Kingdom? Are those part of the general review? If the tax-raising powers of a Scottish Parliament are to be used, will there be offsetting savings in public expenditure for the rest of the United Kingdom?

Those questions must have been approached at the start of this review of public expenditure, but the Chief Secretary has told us about none of them, nor about the specifics of his approach.

A moment ago, the Prime Minister gave the leader of the Liberal Democrats the impression that the purpose was to tighten up fiscal policy. We listened to him say yet again that every departmental total is set for two years. He went on to criticise the record, and was plainly talking about tightening up policy. Is that the case? Are public spending plans to be stuck to for two years and then reduced, or are we right strongly to suspect that, whatever else comes out of this review, the Labour Government will spend much more public money in three years' time than would have been spent had the former Conservative Government stayed in office?

Mr. Darling: It would be wrong of me not to congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) on his showing in yesterday's leadership election. We wish him well, although we appreciate that the feeling may not be shared by all the Members on the Opposition Front Bench. I also welcome him and what is left of the former Government's Treasury team to the Opposition Front Bench, as only two of them made it through the general election.

The last time that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made a statement, the right hon. and learned Gentleman complained bitterly that he had not had time to look at it. I understand that he received my statement at 1.30 pm, although one might not have realised that for all he had to say about it.

Let me deal with the questions that the right hon. and learned Gentleman put. When it comes to fairness, the Conservative party is in no position whatever to lecture us or anyone else. Everyone in the country remembers the poll tax, which said everything that anyone needs to know about the Conservative party's lack of fairness. Nor is the right hon. and learned Gentleman in a position to lecture us on waste. This country is paying an extremely high price for the problems that have arisen as a result of the BSE scandal to which the previous Government contributed through their short-sighted decisions.

As for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question about whether we would keep the share of public spending below 40 per cent., every year the Conservative party announced a total, and every year they failed to meet that total. It is therefore in no position to lecture us on keeping to promises. *[Interruption.]*

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked a number of specific questions—*[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members would stop bawling and shouting, they might hear the answers. I shall deal with the questions in turn. First, on provision by the public and private sector, we have always made it clear that our approach is pragmatic. What counts is what works. The Conservative party was hidebound by a dogmatic approach that was both inefficient and wasteful.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also said that our approach to the National Audit Office was about smoke and mirrors. On the contrary—it is to shine some light on public finances. Because of the position we inherited, we asked the National Audit Office to look at some of the assumptions that had been made. I should have thought that, in the interests of open government, the right hon. and learned Gentleman might have welcomed that. He also asked about the PFI definitions. We are determined to make the PFI work, unlike the last Government, who spoke a lot about it but had precious little to show for it, whether in health or any other area.

I agree that the Euro-PES system is a useful discipline, not just in this country but to keep a check on European spending. The Barnett formula has been in place for some 20 years, and the Conservative Government did nothing about it. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's

comments were therefore a bit ri[illegible]ter all, he used to be one of the most passionate su[illegible]ers of devolution, with, I believe, tax-raising powers.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I welcome the statement, especially in the light of the important intervention that the Government have made in public expenditure. We should also welcome the most fundamental review that we have seen in recent years and look forward to seeing its effect. It will bring fresh light into the annual public expenditure debate, and I hope that the next one we have will take that into account.

Will my right hon. Friend inform us whether the House of Commons will be involved in such a debate? We do not want to wait for a whole year to pass before we see some of the possibilities that will now be open to us.

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and congratulate him on all the work he did as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee over the past few years. He conducted the Committee in an entirely non-partisan way, which will be a good example to his successor.

My right hon. Friend asked about the involvement of the House. The terms of reference of the reviews will be published shortly. My right hon. Friends the heads of Departments will welcome input from wherever it comes—inside or outside the House. As the reviews proceed, the House will become aware of the results. It is expected that the fruits of the reviews will be announced in different ways and at different times, as and when the work is completed, but there will be ample opportunity for the House to pass judgment on them.

The object of the exercise is to introduce as much transparency as possible, so that people can see what the Government's objectives are and judge us on whether they are achieved. At the same time, they will have an opportunity to make contributions to policy development as the process continues.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The Liberal Democrats welcome the Government's announcement of a full review. A new Government with a new set of priorities must clearly examine all departmental spending and determine how it should be changed in the light of new Government priorities.

During the period of consultation, will there be open sharing of the discussions that are going on, so that the House will have some opportunity to influence the outcome?

The Chief Secretary's review will concentrate on how spending might change in two years' time—it is very much for the medium term. That reminds me and the House of Keynes's dictum that, in the long term, we are all dead. Is it not strange—the Prime Minister's answer was inadequate—that if, in the course of the review, serious savings can be found, the Government are not prepared to transfer a single penny out of any departmental spending to meet a cash shortfall that occurs anywhere else? Is that not unrealistic and unnecessary?

In spite of the very small commitments that the Government have made, will not the crisis in education and health continue for the next two years, with rising class sizes, more teachers being dispatched and increasing NHS waiting lists? How on earth will the Government tackle that? What will they do about it?

Mr. Darling: I appreciate the support from the hon. Gentleman and his party for the review generally. He is right to say that it looks to the medium and the long term. I can assure him that the Government intend to be around in both the medium and the long term, so he need have no worry on that score. It is important that the Government look to the long term, and do not conduct their affairs simply to react to crises and problems that arise year on year. The Government must have a long-term view, as I think the hon. Gentleman would accept.

With regard to the next two years, we set out our position in the manifesto. It was made entirely clear, as it was by the Prime Minister a few moments ago. Before any question of raising additional money arises, surely it makes sense to ask ourselves, in each and every Government Department—the same applies to local government—where the money is being spent at present. Is it being spent in the most appropriate way? Local authorities should be asking themselves that all the time.

The difference between the Labour party and the Liberals—apart from the fact that we knew that there was every chance that we might win the election and therefore did not make promises unless we were prepared to keep them—is that we are also prepared to conduct a root-and-branch examination of where the public money is spent, so that we can influence and underpin the future decisions that we will take.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I welcome the review, because it is important for us to make best use of what we have. With regard to its terms of reference, may I bring to my right hon. Friend's attention my concern about education, and about the fact that local authorities such as my own in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire have been underfunded year on year on year, without any level playing field? Will my right hon. Friend consult local authorities closely to make sure that the urgent and long-term educational needs of our children are addressed in the review?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her kind comments. She will know that, as we made clear during the election campaign, we have pledged in our manifesto to increase the amount of national income that is spent on education over a five-year Parliament. She is correct when she says that the Departments of Education and the Environment must keep in touch with local authorities. All hon. Members have schools in their constituencies and are well aware of the difficulties that they face.

I repeat that, if we are to build for a successful future and to ensure that expenditure on education is spent well and that standards are raised, we must be satisfied that existing expenditure is allocated appropriately.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, every time he drives north through Bedfordshire on the A1, he negotiates one of the most dangerous stretches of road in Europe? It is imperative that several small road safety schemes be

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

carried out in that area. Must they wait two years before anything is done, while the warm words congeal on the plate?

Mr. Darling: I assume that the right hon. and learned Gentleman had no luck in the past 18 years in persuading his colleagues of the merits of those schemes when they had responsibility for the A1 and for every other road in the country.

I do not often drive up the A1—it is some years since I have done so—but I think I know the stretch of road to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman refers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions is reviewing the roads programme, and I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will want to make representations to him, in the hope that my right hon. Friend will listen to him with more consideration than his right hon. Friends did.

Mr. Giles Radice (North Durham): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is entirely sensible for a newly elected Government to implement their manifesto pledge to conduct a root-and-branch examination of public spending, particularly when it amounts to £300 billion? I am amazed that the Conservative party does not welcome such a review—I suppose it is because it is in the throes of a chaotic leadership election.

Mr. Darling: Nothing surprises me about the Conservatives,, who appear to be descending to some extremely oppositionist tactics. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. He has done valuable work in the past while serving on the Treasury Select Committee. Opposition Members might have grounds for complaint—because it would be quite irresponsible—if we did not embark on reviews such as this. This review is absolutely essential. We promised to conduct it, and it is another Labour promise that we are implementing.

Madam Speaker: Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that there is an inconsistency—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. I called Mr. Heathcoat-Amory—my pronunciation must be very bad this afternoon. We shall hear from the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey).

Mr. Davey: I apologise, Madam Speaker: I thought that you had called me.

Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that there is an inconsistency in his statement? He began by pillorying the previous Administration and their fiscal figures, claiming that they were always changing and were incorrect. However, he is then prepared to accept their spending pledges and to embrace them as somehow sensible and practical. That approach is not consistent. May I suggest a way out for him and for his right hon. Friend the Chancellor: they could review capping and local government finance immediately, thereby enabling local authorities to raise council tax and spend the proceeds on education.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman will know, if he has read our manifesto, that we are committed to examining the current crude capping system as part of the review process. As for his other points, either he has not listened to the debate or he wrote his question beforehand, because I have answered his queries when replying to other speakers.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): While sitting in this place every day, I have heard Liberal Members asking questions about this, that and the other at every question time. I get the impression that they have already spent the 1p on income tax six times over during this Parliament.

On a more serious note, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that any spending review and any resulting savings could mean a net loss of jobs? Another part of the Labour manifesto promised that we would protect jobs. Therefore, will he ensure that this comprehensive review will not result in a net loss of jobs, and that any savings made will be used to ring-fence prescription charges?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I agree whole-heartedly with what he said about the Liberals. During the election campaign, the Liberals must have spent the 1p several times over. We had only to listen to successive Liberal spokesmen at different studios throughout the country to find that the money was spent over and over again.

We have made it clear that all aspects of Government spending must be examined. It would be wrong, for example, to exclude prescription charge problems where there are anomalies, where one illness is recognised for free prescriptions while others are not. My right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of Health will be examining that.

My hon. Friend will be aware, first, that we are committed to introducing the welfare to work programme, which is an important part of our promise to the country. The programme will put many people who are now unemployed back into work or into educational opportunities. Secondly, it is essential—this underpins my statement—that we have a stable economic background that will enable us to achieve long-term sustainable growth, which is the one way that we shall be able to guarantee to increase jobs across the board.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): May I save the Minister the trouble and expense of this review by telling him that the public expenditure targets that he has signed up to are indeed tough, as they should be, but perfectly attainable given enough political determination? They will not be achieved, however, if he continues to take on extra unnecessary expenditure such as shutting down the entirely legitimate sport of .22 pistol shooting and having to compensate those affected. Will the right hon. Gentleman take responsibility for the expenditure target that he has taken on rather than continue to govern by review?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. He seems to have more confidence in the former Government's spending totals than the shadow Chancellor does.

As for the Government's compensation scheme, it is one of those issues where Members have to reach a judgment on whether the banning of the guns concerned is justified, as many right hon. and hon. Members believe. If it is justified, consequences flow for compensation. There is a wider issue at stake, which the House is about to debate, rather than the sum that might be spent on compensation.

Ms Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): May I take this opportunity of welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement? Does he agree that we need long-term spending plans for public spending priorities, and that it was right to make those plans? Does my right hon. Friend agree also that it is time now to break out of the boom-and-bust policies that so dogged the Conservative party?

Mr. Darling: I absolutely agree on both points. The legacy of boom and bust, which the previous Government left us, and which they inflicted on the country, has been highly damaging. It is one reason why industry and business have not taken the long-term view that has been taken in other countries. Sound public finances are an integral part of ensuring that we have a stable platform on which to build.

I agree with my hon. Friend about the need for long-term spending plans. Members on both sides of the House have referred to the difficulties that local authorities face. Difficulties arise where spending programmes are suddenly changed because the Government lose control of their economic objectives. We are determined not to allow that to happen to us.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): At the beginning of his statement, the right hon. Gentleman expressed his righteous horror at the tremendous growth in public sector debt over the past few years. Is part of the intention behind the review to move towards a balanced budget? If so, what is the right hon. Gentleman's time scale for that? If assets are identified during the review that are not needed, and they are to be disposed of, how will the right hon. Gentleman use the moneys that result? Will they be used for current expenditure or for the reduction of public sector debt?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman has raised two points. First, we are committed to the golden rule of public expenditure. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will have more to say about that in his Budget statement shortly.

So far as assets are concerned, there are two points. The compilation of a national register of all the assets that the state owns is long overdue. The Ministry of Defence, for example, owns some 90,000 buildings, and the public and the House would expect any Government to take a rational view as to whether those assets are needed.

With respect, before deciding how the money should be spent, it is important to find out whether it can be raised in the first place. As I said in my statement, if we do not need assets—wherever they may be—there is no point in holding on to them. It would be far better to sell them and use the proceeds so that they benefit public finances and public services.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Can we assume from the Chief Secretary's response to the former Chancellor that the Barnett formula is sacrosanct in all circumstances?

Mr. Darling: As I said, the Barnett formula has been in existence for some 20 years—it was not disturbed by the previous Government. As my hon. Friend will see when the White Papers on devolution are published, we believe that the Barnett formula, based as it is on the needs of the populations of the different countries, plays a very important part in deciding how public expenditure is to be divided up. He will see the position clearly stated in the White Papers, which are to be published shortly.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that he is keen to have transparency. In the interests of transparency, will he tell the House whether, in this extensive review, he anticipates any changes in the definition of what is and what is not public expenditure? In particular, does he intend to look at the definition of public expenditure as performed by local authorities?

Did the right hon. Gentleman really mean to suggest—as he did in reply to an earlier question—that the current criteria for capping will have to wait until the review is completed and, therefore, will not be effective for the next two years?

Mr. Darling: I had not realised that the hon. Gentleman was such a fierce opponent of capping, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, who is reviewing these matters, will listen with great care to what he has said.

So far as changing definitions is concerned, the House will be aware that there are no shortcuts. Fiddling definitions to achieve an end is not justified and we do not intend to do it.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): When the Prime Minister referred at Question Time to the interest rates on the national debt, did he not underline the need for this review if the Government are to deliver their strategic priorities for welfare, education and the national health service, and deliver them with efficiency and fairness?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is quite right. The public would expect public funds to be used wherever possible to deliver front-line services such as education rather than on repaying debt. As the Prime Minister has said, the national debt doubled under the Conservatives between 1990 and the election.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Chief Secretary is obviously right to conduct a review, but, given that the stated objectives in the review he has announced today are motherhood and apple pie, I think that we have a right to probe a bit further.

Is it the right hon. Gentleman's purpose to try to set the trend for changing priorities between Government Departments or is it a set of priorities within one

[Mr. Ian Taylor]

Government Department that cannot have a virement to another Government Department? Is he attempting to try to inject more private capital into the public system? Is he attempting to change the Euro-PES system, under which I, as a former DTI Minister, suffered considerably, or is this whole thing a smokescreen to try to keep his own Back Benchers happy for the next two years while he struggles with the existing spending plans?

Mr. Darling: I know what the hon. Gentleman is saying about Euro-PES, but it is important to keep discipline, not just in UK public spending, and to maintain pressure on European spending.

On private capital, the hon. Gentleman will know that the Labour party has been committed to public and private partnerships for many years. Indeed, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister first raised that before the 1992 election. Where it is appropriate, the introduction of private capital in the provision of public services is something we support. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of Health made an announcement about that yesterday.

So far as the hon. Gentleman's general welcome is concerned, he will appreciate that he would have been on far stronger ground if the Government had declined to examine what they spend their money on. Indeed, I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, as a member of the previous Government, might have urged his colleagues to do the same thing when they were in power.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the money within Departments, as opposed to across Government as a whole. We have told heads of Departments that, if they want to reallocate resources, they must consider that; but any Government, and the Chancellor in particular, must review the allocation of spending between Departments overall. Of course, ultimately, the Cabinet has responsibility for all public spending to ensure that its programme and objectives are delivered right across the board, and we will do that.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that no area of spending will be exempt from the review? For example, will the review include spending on Trident and Eurofighter? Will he also be looking at the long-term revenue consequences of using private funding to finance capital projects, as against the revenue consequences of public borrowing?

Mr. Darling: On the latter point, my hon. Friend will no doubt be aware that the Government, like, I think, the previous Government, are committed to introducing resource accounting, which will enable us to make better comparisons between public and private provision. The present system of public accounting leaves much to be desired and, in the view of some, is rather old-fashioned and inappropriate for today's practices. That will enable us to obtain a better comparison between the two, which is clearly important, because we must be satisfied that, whichever way we procure public services—whether publicly, privately or a combination of both—we are obtaining value for money.

My hon. Friend will also be aware that, some two weeks ago, my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary announced a defence review. But I can assure her that, right across the board, the comprehensive review means exactly what she might think—it will be looking at all aspects of public expenditure.

Mr. Cynog Dafis (Ceredigion): Does the Chief Secretary accept that there will be a suspicion that what he is about is kicking the whole issue of public expenditure into touch at a time when there is a crying need for additional public expenditure in so many areas? Does the right hon. Gentleman subscribe to the view that public expenditure should be no more than 40 per cent. of GNP, and on what basis of rationality does he approve of that target? Finally, does the right hon. Gentleman see lottery money as part of public expenditure?

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor will clearly have more to say on public spending as a percentage of GNP in his Budget statement. However, I disagree with the hon. Gentleman that this is somehow an attempt to kick public spending decisions into touch—far from it. If we did not start thinking now about the problems that we may face during this Parliament and beyond, he might have been on strong ground for criticising us.

The Government are taking a long-term view of public spending; because it sometimes takes a long time to change the pattern of spending to make provision for three or four years' time, it is only right that we should start the review immediately on entering office.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the spending review must ensure that efficiency becomes the watchword of the Government? Does he agree that the Opposition's record is one of waste and inefficiency, as exemplified by the BSE and poll tax fiascos?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I said, the Government spend some £5,000 for every man, woman and child in Britain, and the public expect that all public expenditure, whether by the Government, local government, quangos or whatever, should be efficient. My hon. Friend is right that the previous Government's record in that regard left much to be desired.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I sincerely congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment. I wish that it was possible to say equally sincerely that he has made a good start. However, he has spectacularly evaded all the key questions asked by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke)—including, for example, the question whether if additional spending is voted by a Scottish Parliament, that will be compensated for by public expenditure reductions elsewhere or whether that would simply be a way of driving a coach and horses through the Government's public expenditure totals with impunity.

If the right hon. Gentleman insists on running away from that question, let me ask another. He said that he will have an asset review and that public expenditure will depend on the result. Does that mean that if he identifies additional possibilities for privatisation, the proceeds of those privatisation sales will finance additional public expenditure rather than be used to reduce indebtedness;

and that, therefore, the undertaking by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that, for the next two years, the existing public expenditure departmental totals will be respected, is now—how shall I delicately put it?—inoperative?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is just wrong on his final point. We made our position clear on departmental spending, not only in the manifesto but subsequently. I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman could not welcome what I said. I fear that he will be on Finance Bill Committees for many years to come, so we shall cross swords there, if not on the Floor of the House, in the future.

Ms Beverley Hughes (Stretford and Urmston): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the clear direction that it gives. He referred to exploring the potential for further public-private sector partnerships. As a former leader of a metropolitan authority, may I ask him whether the Government will build on the outstanding record of Labour local authorities in initiating, sustaining and developing partnerships between the public and private sectors?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is quite right: many local authorities, particularly Labour-controlled authorities, have a good record on public and private finance initiatives, and we want to encourage that. It makes sense to harness the experience of both sectors and to bring them together. That can be wholly beneficial for the communities they serve. At the end of the day, people living in a community want the best possible services. The means of providing those services are usually of less concern to them than the end result of producing what they want at a price that they can afford.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): Does the Chief Secretary understand the public's bewilderment that, despite the change of government, some things remain the same, such as the departmental spending totals? The answer that was given during Prime Minister's questions to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) suggested that, despite the fact that economies in departmental spending may be identified, there will be no change in the way in which spending is allocated.

Does the statement not disguise the Government's attempt to create a smokescreen to hide the fact that public services need more resources? They would do more for honesty if they confronted that reality. Will the Chief Secretary give a definitive and clear answer, which he certainly did not give to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), to questions about the sanctity of the Barnett formula and its status in the review?

Mr. Darling: I am surprised that the hon. Member goes on about the sanctity of the Barnett formula, given that his party is committed to ending it once and for all. He is in no position to lecture us on that. I have made our position clear. The Government will shortly publish a White Paper on the referendums on devolution, so he will be able to see for himself what our position is.

The hon. Gentleman asserted that the public will be bewildered about our public spending proposals. They will not be bewildered, because we stood on a manifesto commitment on public spending and we are now delivering it. The public are seeing a Government who deliver on their promises—although I appreciate that that may bewilder Conservative Members.

Finally, I shall make a parochial point for those of us who represent Scottish constituencies. We stood on a manifesto, as did the hon. Gentleman, and our party did rather better than his, so there is no cause for bewilderment.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): May I make three points? First, I welcome the publication of the review's terms of reference and I hope that the document will be widely available so that hon. Members can examine them with some intent. Secondly, it would be useful if that document set out the review's strategic objectives in more detail than my right hon. Friend has been able to give us.

Thirdly, I should like a clearer statement of the methodology that will be used in the review. As I understand it, my right hon. Friend intends to drive the review through a departmental process rather than engage external resources. Will he clarify that?

Mr. Darling: Perhaps I could explain to my hon. Friend, and to the House in general, that it was tempting to delay making the statement until all the terms of reference were agreed and the work was under way. However, no doubt the first person to complain about that would have been the shadow Chancellor, as he has complained about delays in the past. We took the view that it was appropriate to tell the House at this stage what we intended to do. As I have said, we shall publish the terms of reference. So that is the answer on timing.

As for the Departments, the review will engage effort and support right across the Government. All Ministers will be involved. It is appropriate for Departments to carry out their examinations not with the assistance of the Treasury and the efficiency unit alone, but in addition, where appropriate, by engaging the services of people outside.

One of the purposes of making an announcement today is to tell the public, through the House, what we are doing. Many members of the public have clear ideas about how the Government deliver services and how those services might be improved, and they will have the opportunity to contribute.

Lastly, of course, the work has been co-ordinated by the public expenditure committee, a small Cabinet committee, which will ensure that we look right across the board to drive the process forward and achieve the results we want.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip–Northwood): May I remind the Chief Secretary that, during the general election campaign, Labour spokesmen were assiduous in assuring the voters that there would be no question of Eurofighter's coming under an expenditure review conducted by the Ministry of Defence? Why does he now say that the review will extend to Eurofighter?

How does that square with the supposed efforts of the Secretary of State for Defence to persuade the federal German Government, and his German counterpart, Volker Rühe, to make a production investment on a par with that already earmarked by the United Kingdom Treasury for its share in the production of that most important aeroplane?

Mr. Darling: On Eurofighter, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at last week's Question Time. He made

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the British Government's position on Eurofighter absolutely clear. My point was that the Secretary of State for Defence and the Foreign Secretary are conducting a review of this country's strategic defence needs for the future, and at the same time, clearly, we are examining the way in which the MOD spends its money.

Any strategic review must be influenced not only by what we would like to do but by what we can afford. The hon. Gentleman, who has long taken an interest in defence, may have some sympathy with that proposition. The Prime Minister made our position on Eurofighter clear and if the hon. Gentleman cares to read last Wednesday's *Hansard*, he will see it clearly set out.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Thank you. We shall now move on.

Points of Order

4.16 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid–Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I am sure that you will agree that it is good for democracy and of benefit to the House that the questioning of the Prime Minister on a regular basis be free and open. Did you notice that, during Question Time, quite extraordinarily, for every question and supplementary question, only one Labour Member stood up at any one time? That either demonstrates an extraordinary telepathy, or suggests that questions to the Prime Minister are not free and open but are being manipulated. I suggest that Question Time is being abused. May I ask you to investigate?

Madam Speaker: I cannot accept the premise on which the hon. Gentleman bases a point of order that is not really a point of order. The number of people who rise has nothing to do with the Speaker. If the hon. Gentleman were to look through the Order Paper carefully, as I do, he would see how few opportunities there are for Back Benchers on either side to put a question to the Prime Minister, because of the way in which the ballot operates.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: No, not on the same point. It is not a point of order; it is a matter for the House.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): On a separate point of order, Madam Speaker. Will you look at the *Official Report* to see whether, in your judgment, the length of time that the Prime Minister takes to answer questions is crowding out the opportunities for Back Benchers to put them?

Madam Speaker: I am delighted to be able to tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that I am recording the length both of answers and of the questions put to all Departments. I have not yet completed my inquiry, but when I do I shall have some useful information, which I shall take up with the shadow Leader of the House, as well as with the Leader of the House. I am looking forward to doing so.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It was kind of the Prime Minister to come to the House today when clearly he had many international commitments, but there will be occasions when it will be unreasonable for the House to insist on his attendance. It occurs to me that one of the snags of the new arrangements is that, if he is not here on a Wednesday, there is no further chance to question him during that week. I wonder whether you could see that a message gets to the Leader of the House about this point. A week might be a long time in Parliament, but two weeks is such a long time that it is even enough to elect a leader of our party.

Madam Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's comments will have been noted by those on the Treasury Bench.

Sir David Madel (South–West Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that questions

to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury could not have gone on for ever, but, now that we have a Labour Government, could we have brief, Attlee-type questions and answers? The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd), who has just left the Chamber, asked three questions, which chipped away at vital time that you might have allowed Opposition Members to use—although I am in no way criticising you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am delighted to hear that the hon. Gentleman is not criticising me. I wish we could get back to the Attlee days—particularly at business questions. At that time, Members asked long rambling questions and the Leader of the House simply answered, "No, not next week," and moved on. That was a good period, and it would be splendid to get back to that sort of thing. As Attlee said, "No good at the job—out".

Orders of the Day

Firearms (Amendment) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. My concern originates from the long-standing convention of the House that no intervention be made on a maiden speech. The debate will, I hope, be a sensible and perhaps energetic scrutiny of some aspects of the Government's proposals. There are many new Members, some of whom have delivered a maiden speech and some who have not. To avoid confusion—and perhaps embarrassment—would it be possible for you to counsel the House and hon. Members taking part in the debate, who could indicate by semaphore at the outset whether their contribution to the business of the House is their first? Perhaps you can provide some sign yourself, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that if a Member who stands up to speak does not have a familiar face, he should listen carefully to the first few phrases, in which a Member making a maiden speech usually pays tribute to his or her predecessor and makes nice comments about his or her constituency. If he or she fails to do that, the Speaker always knows who is making a maiden speech, as do the Whips on either side of the Chamber. Anyone who is interested can approach the Chair or the Whips to find out who is making a maiden speech. I want to be helpful in that area.

4.22 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

None of us will ever forget the appalling events that took place on 13 March 1996 in Dunblane, when 16 innocent children and their teacher were gunned down by Thomas Hamilton, armed with a lawfully licensed handgun. In response to that tragedy, the previous Parliament passed the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, which banned all higher-calibre handguns. We supported it, but, in our view, it did not go far enough. In our manifesto, we said this about gun control:

> "In the wake of Dunblane and Hungerford, it is clear that only the strictest firearms laws can provide maximum safety. There will be legislation to allow individual Members of Parliament a free vote for a complete ban on handguns."

That is why, only five weeks after taking office, we have proposed this Bill to give effect to that manifesto commitment.

I strongly commend the Bill's proposals to the House, but I want to make it crystal clear that—as in opposition—it will be a matter for my hon. Friends' individual consciences to decide whether to support or oppose the measure tonight. But none of us should doubt the overwhelming public support for the proposed ban. For only one indication of the extent of public support for a complete handgun ban, I draw the attention of the House to the results of an opinion poll in *The Daily Telegraph*

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last Friday, which showed that 83 per cent. of those polled approved of the Government's proposed ban on all handguns.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): The opinion poll may or may not be correct, but on that logic, the Home Secretary would be introducing a Bill to reinstate capital punishment. Every time there is a poll on that subject, 75 per cent. of people are in favour. That is not a good argument for the Bill.

Mr. Straw: I do not accept the premise of the hon. Gentleman's argument. Of course, it is, in the end, a matter for the individual consciences of hon. Members, but, in making our decisions, we must take account of the strength of public feeling. I do not think that anything like 83 per cent. of people are in favour of capital punishment, but I am well aware that I may not have had my constituents' support when I have marched into the Lobby against it. That is a fact which I have to take into account, but it does not stop me. In a matter of public safety, it is important to recognise the extent of public support for what is in the Bill.

The Bill proposes a total ban on all civilian handguns in general use. The question was last debated on an amendment courageously moved by Mr. Robert Hughes, then Conservative Member of Parliament for Harrow, West. With every justification, he said:

"I have evidence from my conversations with a number of Ministers and parliamentary private secretaries that, on a free vote tonight, they would vote for the banning of all handguns."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 789.]

I suspect that it was precisely because of the prospect that a free vote would have resulted in the acceptance of Mr. Hughes's amendment that Conservative Members were placed under a three-line Whip, imposed, I believe, at the instigation of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). The amendment was defeated by 25 votes and the British people have been forced as a result to wait another six months for the outright ban that they patently support to be put before Parliament.

Let me first explain the Bill's provisions. Clause 1 extends to small-calibre pistols—.22 and below—the ban instituted by the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): Everybody recognises the tragedy of Dunblane, but in the aftermath of such a tragedy—an important action has already been taken in the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997—it is essential for the House to look after the liberties of citizens, including minorities. Could the Home Secretary tell us clearly on what basis of principle the Government think it proper to interfere with people's lawful recreation?

Mr. Straw: The basis of principle is the protection of the public. I do not think that there is a huge amount between us and the previous Government, who decided that the protection of the public required the banning of 80 per cent. of handguns, and that that should override what the right hon. and learned Gentleman was absolutely right to say that we should all be concerned about—the protection of minorities. We are proposing, for reasons that I shall explain when I set out the detail of how the Bill will operate, to extend that ban to 100 per cent. of handguns in general civilian use.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): On how many occasions in the past 50 years has a small-calibre pistol been used to commit murder, and what categorisations and classifications have come from that? A small-calibre handgun is designed for sport and for no other purpose, although of course it could be abused.

Mr. Straw: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raises that issue, because I sought to establish whether the statistics on firearms murders distinguished between small-calibre and high-calibre weapons; the answer is that they do not. We know, however, as I shall explain in more detail later, that .22 weapons are lethal. As he asks who has been murdered with such weapons, I can mention Robert Kennedy and Yitzhak Rabin. I also draw his attention to the fact that .22 weapons are used for the purpose of killing people both by the Israeli security service and by our own Special Air Services.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Obviously, all of us, including my right hon. Friend, are concerned about public safety. Is he aware of my constituents' overriding concern, which is the huge number of illegally held weapons? The police were called out to more than 800 firearms incidents last year in my borough and all the guns were held illegally. How will anything in the Bill help to make my constituents safe from illegally held guns, as opposed to those held in pistol shooting clubs?

Mr. Straw: I am well aware, as my hon. Friend knows, of the problems with firearms incidents in her constituency, because I happen to live there. That important issue was debated at some length during the passage of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. We cannot describe with absolute precision the relationship between the regulation of lawfully held weapons and the availability of unlawful weapons. However, we know that countries that have lax firearms controls also have a high level of use of firearms in crimes, and the reverse is true.

We may take the two extremes. The first is the United States, where it is easy in most states of the union to buy weapons over the counter, as I have seen myself, and where there is a huge level of firearms-related homicides and other incidents. At the other end of the scale, Japan has even tighter controls than this country will have, even after the Bill comes into force, and a low level of firearms-related murders. I can also tell my hon. Friend that, in 1995, almost 400 lawfully licensed pistols were stolen. Every one of those pistols was stolen for use by criminals.

Mr. Frank Cook: My right hon. Friend mentioned the assassination of Kennedy in the United States and of Yitzhak Rabin in Israel. Does he believe that if .22s had been illegal in those countries, those assassinations would not have taken place?

Mr. Straw: It is not possible to say that absolutely, but there is no doubt that if the availability of handguns is restricted, the prospect of their being used in crime is much less.

Clause 1 of the Bill extends to small-calibre pistols the ban instituted by the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. It does that by putting small-calibre pistols in the same prohibited category of weapons as machine guns, semi-automatic rifles and higher-calibre handguns. The ban does not extend to the narrow range of exemptions already contained in the 1997 Act for people such as vets, slaughterhouse workers and race officials at athletic meetings. Provided such people can convince their police force of a specific need to hold a higher-calibre or .22 handgun for one of the stated purposes, they may do so. In the majority of cases, a firearms certificate will have to be held with the necessary conditions, as specified by the police.

Clause 2 contains a number of consequential amendments to the 1997 Act, which bring the provisions for the surrender of small-calibre pistols into line with those for higher-calibre handguns. The clause also extends the compensation provisions of the 1997 Act to those small-calibre pistols and ancillary equipment. The compensation scheme for those weapons will not be subject to parliamentary affirmative approval, as we intend that it will follow the same lines as that for higher-calibre handguns and ancillary equipment under the 1997 Act, the scheme in respect of which was approved on Monday. A copy of the document describing the administrative arrangements for making ex gratia payments for those items has already been placed in the Library. That is because, from 1 July this year, owners of smaller-calibre pistols will be able to surrender pistols and ancillary equipment on a voluntary basis and to receive an ex gratia payment.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe) *rose—*

Mr. Straw: I give way to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Howard: Is not it the case, however, that the position on compensation as a result of the Bill will be significantly different from that which arose on the previous legislation? A total ban on handguns will force many clubs to close, which will change the position. Have the Government considered compensating clubs that will be forced to close as a direct result of the Bill, because they will no longer be able to remain open for those who use .22 calibre pistols?

Mr. Straw: We have applied in the Bill exactly the same provisions for compensation that the shadow Secretary of State—I apologise to him for my error earlier—introduced when he was Secretary of State for the Home Department just a few months ago. If he can show any point in the Bill where we have departed from those principles in respect of our treatment of clubs, I shall certainly actively consider the point that he makes.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): Following the question of the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) about guns in illegal circulation, is there any evidence that pistol shooters who previously used large-bore pistols are using compensation money to switch to .22 calibre guns? It has been suggested that the Act, as it stands, will not reduce the number of pistols because there will be such a transfer. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that that transfer is not taking place and that therefore, as a result of the Act, there is a fundamental reduction in the number of handguns in circulation.

Mr. Straw: It was a matter of speculation in the previous Parliament as to whether a reduction in the availability of lawfully licensed handguns down to .22 calibre and below would result in people switching from higher-calibre handguns to lower-calibre handguns. We cannot say for certain what would have happened had there not been a change of Government. I suspect that, following our manifesto commitment, which could not have been clearer, most people who are going to hand in their higher-calibre weapons will not bother to purchase .22 handguns, for the obvious reason that they are likely to be banned very shortly.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): On the subject of manifesto commitments, the Home Secretary will be aware that, since the legislation introduced by my right hon. and learned Friend the former Home Secretary, his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has committed the Labour party to maintaining departmental spending totals. There is now a new spending commitment in respect of compensation for .22 handguns. What impact will that have on departmental spending plans and where will compensatory savings have to be made?

Mr. Straw: That will be met from within the Home Office budget. It is a relatively small amount compared with the total compensation that was provided for by the shadow Home Secretary when he was the Home Secretary.

Clause 2 gives effect to the schedule containing consequential repeals and clause 3 deals with the short title and provisions as to commencement and extent. The Bill applies to England, Wales and Scotland but not to Northern Ireland.

If, as I hope, the Bill becomes law, many entirely law-abiding holders of handguns of .22 calibre and below will be denied the opportunity to practise their sport. To pick up the point raised by the former Attorney-General, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), as elected Members of Parliament, we all have to be very careful before we use our power to prohibit actions that were previously lawful and involved no criminal intent. Simple disapproval can never be a ground alone for prohibition. I have thought about the matter a great deal. I accept that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and I may have come to different judgments, but I want him and the House to know that I do not lightly come to the House proposing the prohibition of an activity that will affect many people who previously lawfully and entirely properly practised that activity.

We must bear in mind the fact that many branches of handgun competition involve higher-calibre weapons. The provisions of the 1997 Act that was brought in by the previous Government will make it impossible generally for followers of those competitions to practise their sport in Britain. All target shooting disciplines in the Olympic games are restricted to multi-shot handguns of .22 calibre. I know that that matter weighed with the former Home Secretary when he came forward with his proposals.

[Mr. Straw]

The Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Robertson), when he was the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland, and I in opposition considered carefully whether there could be separate provision short of an outright ban for such weapons. In the event, not least because of Lord Cullen's conclusions, we decided that creating a distinction between .22 weapons and others would not be safe or enforceable. We therefore concluded, as we said in our initial evidence to the Cullen inquiry, that, given the lethal nature of handguns, we saw a strong case for banning them altogether.

As a result of the provisions of the 1997 Act and the Bill, it will in general no longer be possible to practise handgun sports on the mainland of Britain. I want to make it clear that that will not in any way stop Britain hosting either the Commonwealth games or, at some future stage, the Olympic games. Indeed, as a north-west Member of Parliament, I am delighted that Manchester is to host the Commonwealth games in 2002. That is a great tribute to the city and to the leadership of my hon. Friend the new Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer), who, as leader of Manchester city council for so many years, was instrumental in bringing the games to this country. The games will be a huge boost to Manchester and the north-west of Britain, and I wish them every success.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Do we take it that that has been affirmed by the British Olympic Association and the world Olympic organisation?

Mr. Straw: It certainly has been discussed with the organisers of the Commonwealth games, but I am not aware whether it has been discussed with those organising the Olympic games. I shall ask my hon. Friend the Minister of State to deal with that when he replies to the debate.

Of course, handgun shooting events are part of the Commonwealth games, but we should not lose sight of the fact that they represent just eight out of a total of 174 sporting events at those games. It will be possible to hold pistol shooting competitions at the games, for reasons that I shall explain. In addition, it is important to point out that there are another 18 shooting competitions in the Commonwealth games that involve rifles and air pistols, and British teams will be able to practise for and participate in those competitions.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): My right hon. Friend will be aware that I was a member of the Select Committee on Home Affairs when we discussed that matter. He will also be aware that I have always had grave opposition to the ownership of handguns. I am equally well aware of those who wish to participate in the Olympic games, the Commonwealth games and other international games, and that handgun shooting is part of those competitions. From what my right hon. Friend has said, am I to understand that we shall still allow people to take part in shooting events should the Olympic games or the Commonwealth games be held in the United Kingdom? What puzzles me is, how shall we train our competitors to participate?

Mr. Straw: We shall not be able to train our competitors. There is no dubiety about that. I am not making any pretence about it. The passage of the Bill, along with the 1997 Act that was passed by the previous Parliament, will make it impossible for British residents to practise their sport of pistol shooting. That is the reality. The House must take that into account when deciding whether to back the Bill. There should be no doubt about that.

As for our hosting of either the Commonwealth games in 2002 or the Olympic games at some stage in the future, it will be possible for pistol shooting competitions to be held within the confines of those games. That is because of the provisions of section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968, which is not affected either by the 1997 Act or by the Bill. Under those provisions, special dispensations can be issued on strict conditions to permit target shooting competitions within the context of the games. Those decisions are made by the Secretary of State. Should I be in that position, I would require a guarantee from the organising committee that guns would be handled with the necessary security measures in place.

We shall get in touch with the organisers of the Manchester Commonwealth games in good time, to ensure that arrangements are made to allow target shooting to take place at those championships. As I said earlier, similar arrangements would have to be made for pistol competitions held during any future Commonwealth or Olympic games held in Britain.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Is it not an extraordinary prospect that the right hon. Gentleman is holding out? Foreign teams will be allowed to come to this country to practise a sport in which, in reality, no British team will be able to participate. Is that what he is saying to the House and the country? Is he really saying that foreigners will be allowed to come here and legally do something that our citizens are not allowed to do?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I am saying that. We have to make a balanced choice. My hon. Friends will have a free vote tonight. I am not sure whether Conservative Members will have a similar free vote, but, in the light of the events of the past week, a free vote would probably be advisable on almost every issue. Most people in the country and, as I am sure will be clear in the Lobby tonight, most Members in the House support a ban on handguns in general civilian use. That is the truth and I suspect that that opinion will be approved this evening.

We then have to decide whether to allow that general ban to affect our hosting of the Commonwealth or Olympic games. I have considered the matter closely and I have looked at the powers that the House and the other place agreed in 1968 for special provision in exceptional circumstances. Those provisions are acceptable. There is a world of difference between controlling and securing the safety of the public at specific games such as the Commonwealth games in 2002 and allowing handguns to be held generally by civilians on a licensed basis.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Has the Home Secretary completely ruled out using that

dispensation to enable British competitors to participate in the games and to have a period of training before doing so?

Mr. Straw: I have not ruled that out altogether and if realistic representations are made to me, I shall think about the proposal. But I should require a high degree of convincing before going ahead with it.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): While the Secretary of State is thinking about that matter, will he consider the special position of Bisley? He is well aware that it is the world centre of shooting—a sport in which we have been conspicuously successful in a number of Olympic and Commonwealth games. If the Home Secretary is to consider allowing practice in the way that the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) suggested, will he also consider the special worldwide importance of competitive shooting at Bisley?

Mr. Straw: I shall look at the subject again, but we cannot impose a general ban and then make many exceptions.

The provision will not mean the end of all shooting disciplines for British competitors in the Commonwealth games—it is important to get that message across. There are 26 separate shooting disciplines in the Commonwealth games, and the effect of the 1997 Act and the Bill will be to ban British participation in eight of those disciplines; the other 18, including rifle shooting and airguns, will be fully available to British participants.

Mr. Colvin: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: I am afraid that I cannot as I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman once.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): In view of the questions that we have heard, I hope that my right hon. Friend will not believe that the views expressed are those of the whole House. I, for one, fully support what he is doing and believe that it would be no bad thing if throughout the world there were an end to all sports involving murderous weapons.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is entirely right. We must not forget the extent of public revulsion at the holding of handguns in general civilian use that followed not only Dunblane, but Hungerford. I have no doubt that Labour Members and quite a number of Conservative Members speak for the public and also have the public's safety in mind.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: No, I have already given way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman and I think that I have dealt with his points at great length.

The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 allowed the continued use of .22 pistols under certain conditions. That Act envisaged a complex system of pistol clubs, licensed by the Secretary of State, where .22 weapons could be stored and used. In the debate on 18 November 1996, the then Secretary of State advanced three arguments for allowing .22 weapons to be licensed in secure clubs. First, he claimed by implication that .22 weapons were inherently safer than higher-calibre weapons. He said:

"high-calibre guns are particularly attractive to criminals and their storage in gun clubs in large numbers, whether dismantled or in one piece, would make gun clubs more attractive targets for theft."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 787.]

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's view that criminals would distinguish between higher and lower-calibre weapons is palpable nonsense.

The House was invited to believe that if a criminal gang thought that it could break into a gun club—as surely a determined gang could do—it would then turn away and relinquish the loot the moment it discovered that it contained not .357 magnums, but .22 semi-automatics. It will not happen like that.

Throughout debates in the previous Session, I was struck by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's curious unwillingness to face up to the fact that .22 weapons can kill. However, as I said earlier, they can. Many murderers and assassins choose .22 weapons, and the criminals of whom we are talking would quickly switch their affections to lower-calibre weapons if they thought that they were more easily available.

The truth is, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman by implication accepted, that no level of security could guarantee that .22 pistols could not be removed from licensed clubs; nor is it possible to safeguard the public when those pistols need to be removed, for example, for servicing or repair or for participation in a competition elsewhere in the country or overseas. In his report, Lord Cullen quotes the British Shooting Sports Council as saying:

"no matter what system of checks and paperwork is maintained in such circumstances, it would be a simple matter indeed for a shooter intent on recovering his guns to enter a competition, provide evidence to his club secretary that he had done so, recover possession of the complete gun together with the ammunition for it and perpetrate an outrage."

The second argument advanced by the right hon. and learned Gentleman to justify the partial ban was that higher-calibre weapons are

"four to six times more powerful than a .22 pistol."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1996; Vol. 285, c. 787.]

As we have seen so often, he allowed his casuistry to get the better of him. The issue in terms of public safety is not the absolute power of the weapons, but their ability to kill. Lord Cullen destroyed the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument when he wrote in his report:

"It should not be supposed that .22 rimfire cannot be as lethal as other ammunition. The BSSC pointed out that . . . .22 cartridges would be as lethal as 9 mm."

The truth is that .22 weapons can kill as surely as a higher-calibre weapon.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's third argument was that if there were a complete handgun ban, much shooting would be driven underground. As he knows, I would never dismiss that argument—indeed, it should be taken seriously—but the more I consider it, the less weight it carries with me. By definition, all the weapons under consideration are clearly identified, with the owners known to the police. Penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment apply to those who break the law and fail to hand in their weapons. For legitimate sportsmen and women, opportunities remain for competitive sports with shotguns, rifles and airguns.

[Mr. Straw]

My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) raised the issue of the number of crimes committed by those in possession of unlawful weapons. We have to bear it in mind that the Bill will release a great deal of police time from licensing gun clubs so that they can search for and identify criminals who use guns. For example, section 13 of the 1997 Act requires pistol holders who want to move their gun outside their normal club for certain prescribed reasons to obtain police permits. Section 13 is written in complicated language and that process would be especially bureaucratic for the police to administer, involving them in possibly endless checking and double-checking of the movement of single guns or small groups of guns.

There is a wider point to be made in support of the Bill. Too often, we wait for disaster or worse to strike before taking effective action to secure the public's safety. I have two words for those who say that a total ban goes too far: Hungerford and Dunblane. I claim no special foresight, but if the House had listened over the years to the sage warnings of several hon. Members on both sides, those appalling tragedies might have been averted. Those hon. Members include my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Soley) and for Worsley (Mr. Lewis), both of whom have called consistently over the years for tighter controls.

The House might also have listened to the warnings of the Home Office. Almost 30 years ago, my Department established a review of firearms controls, the findings of which were published in a Green Paper in 1973. That Green Paper recommended highly restrictive controls on firearms, a ban on all semi-automatic rifles and tighter licensing procedures. Had those recommendations been implemented, Michael Ryan could not have lawfully possessed the AK47 rifle with which he killed eight of his 17 victims at Hungerford, and Thomas Hamilton might well have been denied a licence for the 9 mm Browning with which he killed all his victims.

We have to recognise that all of us failed after Hungerford to put in place the controls necessary to reduce significantly the risk of a repeat tragedy. Some 15 months on from the Dunblane killings, we cannot afford to make the same mistake again.

We should listen carefully to the advice of the police, who know best about the dangers to society of the criminal use of weapons. Both the Police Federation and the Police Superintendents Association have come out in favour of a full and total ban. The Police Federation said about our proposals:

"The proposal to ban the private possession of handguns is a victory for common sense. No system can guarantee to exclude every potential mass killer, but we owe it to the victims of Hungerford and Dunblane to take the strongest possible action to prevent a repetition of past tragedies."

It also said:

"We believe the public will strongly support this decisive action."

I believe that the police are right in their opinion of the merits of the Bill.

If, on the basis of the votes today—and later in the other place—this House agrees to extend the ban in the 1997 Act to all handguns, I hope that it will be possible to speed up the remaining stages of the Bill before it goes to the other place. Subject to the views of the other place, I hope that the ban on .22 pistols can be introduced well before the end of the year.

No system of controls, however tough, can guarantee that there will never again be another Dunblane or Hungerford. There will always be a way for the desperate, the cunning and the wicked to murder and maim their fellow men and women. A responsible Government must do all that they can to mitigate the risks and to set a legal framework that gives the maximum possible protection to the innocent. The 1997 Act, introduced by the previous Government and passed by the previous Parliament, did, I accept, go a long way in improving firearms controls in this country. However, as I said at the time, that Act did not go far enough. Its fundamental flaw was that, illogically and dangerously, it allowed 40,000 handguns to remain available for use. I believe that it is now the duty of the House to close that loophole and institute a total ban once and for all.

I recognise, as I always have recognised, that many law-abiding shooters will be inconvenienced or worse, and I regret that. But I am in no doubt about where the balance should be struck between the right to practise a sport and the right to life—especially the right to life of a child. By banning all handguns, this short Bill will contribute greatly to public safety. It will meet the legitimate demands made to the House by many people since the events of Dunblane. To deny the public the protection that the Bill offers would be an abdication of our responsibility. I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr. Robathan: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It relates to the good reputation of the House—which has suffered in the recent past—which I hold dear, which I believe you hold dear and which I am sure all hon. Members regard as of immense importance.

Rumours are circulating that an internal Labour party inquiry into the actions of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) has now been completed. In the interests of the good reputation of the House, should not the details of the findings of that inquiry be made available to hon. Members?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Rumours of that sort are not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not time that the good name of the House was protected by the Government setting up the Select Committee on Standards and Privileges? Why have not the Government done so, and will they now act?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That matter is being dealt with elsewhere. It is not a matter for the Chair.

4.58 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I beg to move, To leave out from 'That' to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Firearms (Amendment) Bill since the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 has dealt comprehensively with the problems identified by Lord Cullen; believes that there is no justification for a total ban on all handguns including those of .22 calibre which would eliminate all legitimate

target shooting; and calls on the Government to delay this intemperate Bill until the Firearms (Amendment) Act has been fully implemented and a proper assessment made of its impact.'

The proposals in the Bill are unnecessary, unfair and expensive. We were all horrified by the tragedy at Dunblane in March 1996. The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, which was the previous Government's response to that dreadful event, received Royal Assent just three months ago. That Act banned all handguns from the home, it outlawed higher-calibre handguns of the type used by Thomas Hamilton and it ensured that lower-calibre handguns could be kept and used only in secure gun clubs. The 1997 Act would take at least 160,000 handguns—80 per cent. of all those held legally in England and Wales—out of circulation.

The Home Secretary gave the impression that the Police Federation and the Police Superintendents Association spoke for all organs of the police. As the Association of Chief Police Officers explained:

"The ban on high calibre handguns and the tightening up of firearms controls generally"—

in the previous Government's legislation—

"will provide a significant improvement in public protection. ACPO's measured view suggested retaining a strictly controlled ability for handgun competitions, limited to .22 weapons, and we very much support both that proposal and the proposed requirements for comprehensive security measures over weapons stored at gun clubs."

So the Association of Chief Police Officers supported not the legislation before the House today but the legislation put before Parliament by the previous Government and passed by the last Parliament. That legislation provides the public with the protection that they need and deserve. It gives this country some of the strictest gun control laws in the world, but allows pistol shooting with low-calibre handguns to continue in secure conditions. The Act has not yet been implemented. Only the night before last, we were debating the compensation arrangements that would apply to those unable to shoot pistols as a consequence of its provisions.

What, therefore, is the justification for introducing the current proposals with such unseemly haste? Why not wait at least until the effect of the 1997 Act can be assessed? Why are the Government so hell bent on denying shooters, including those who take part in Olympic competitions, any opportunity to pursue and enjoy their sport? After all, it is not as though the Labour party has a long-standing commitment to abolishing all pistol shooting. As recently as 24 September last year, the Minister without Portfolio wrote in a letter to one of his constituents:

"There has unfortunately been some misrepresentation of Labour's position on the ownership of handguns. We support a ban on the holding of handguns in residential property. People such as yourself will still be able to own handguns but they must be kept safely under lock and key at properly run centres."

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), said:

"We do think that handguns should be limited to the Olympic standard of .22 calibre and we do think that there is an argument for handguns to be kept in secure storage under supervision at clubs."

That was, perhaps predictably, in an article in the *Shooting Times and Country Magazine* of 3 October 1996.

Both those observations represented a rare outbreak of common sense on the part of the hon. Gentlemen concerned. I suppose that we should not be surprised that it did not last long. The Labour party turned its back on that commonsense approach at its party conference last year, when both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary committed Labour to a total ban on handguns, well before the publication of Lord Cullen's report.

When we introduced our proposals based on, although not precisely following, the views expressed by Lord Cullen in his report, Labour Members opposed them on the basis that they did not go far enough. Clearly, that is the basis of the present legislation. However, where is the justification for it? Where is the compelling need that must always be present if the state is to justify intervention in the otherwise lawful habits of law-abiding citizens? It cannot possibly be said that the 1997 legislation has not worked—it has not yet been tried. In this, as in so many other issues, the new Government demonstrate an arrogance and contempt for the rights of minorities, which will in due course prove their undoing.

The Conservative party believes that the principle of individual liberty that lies at the root of our democracy should compel any Government to take fully into account the views of minorities and minority interests. We contend that there is no compelling justification for the Bill, which is why we shall oppose it.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North–East Derbyshire): Does not the shadow Minister wish that he had gone further with the measure that was presented to us in the previous Parliament? He said that the previous Government did not act in conformity with Lord Cullen, whose first recommendation was dismantling. If that had been adopted, it could have been applied to .22s, and the two vastly opposed positions that now exist in the House might have been avoided.

Mr. Howard: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, for the reasons that he knows well. We debated at great length the pros and cons of dismantling during the passage of the previous legislation. The hon. Gentleman had one view on that, and I had another. It would not do anyone any good if we went over that ground again.

I remind the House of the nature of the constraints introduced by the 1997 Act on the shooting of .22 pistols—the only pistol that the law would still permit. Under the Act, those pistols could be used only in gun clubs that demonstrated that they met strict security criteria and that could satisfy the police that their premises had adequate security and that appropriate procedures were put in place to avoid any unauthorised removal of firearms from the premises.

Pistols could be moved from the club only if they needed to be repaired or if the owner were competing in a national target shooting competition at a different club, but, before the gun could be moved, a permit would be required from the police, and the gun would have to be carried by a third party whom the police were satisfied was a fit and proper person to discharge that responsibility.

The Act certainly does not permit unrestricted use of .22 calibre pistols, but it does allow their limited use, so that those who have enjoyed pistol shooting for many years can still do so. Target shooting has a long tradition in Britain. It is an Olympic competition and has been since the 1870s. A total ban would kill off a sport in which Britain does so well. In the 1995 Commonwealth games,

[Mr. Howard]

for example, this country won four gold medals in .22 events. At the 1996 Paralympics in Atlanta, disabled shooters won a gold and a silver medal. Many hundreds of law-abiding people would lose their sport, even though there is no real reason to suppose that the public would be protected more effectively than they would be by the 1997 Act.

For some, target shooting is more than just a sport. I give one example. The British Paraplegic Shooting Association stated that disabled people have found competitive target shooting extremely useful as

"a rehabilitation means to help with balance and confidence, primarily in the use of a wheelchair and sport. This provides them with a better quality of life and respect for themselves as disabled people in an able-bodied world."

What is the Government's justification for this draconian measure? As I said, there is no real reason to suppose that the proposals will increase public safety. Indeed, depriving pistol shooters of any legitimate opportunity for exercising their sport leads to the real danger that some of them might be tempted to exercise that sport outside the law, in circumstances where the risk to the public might inevitably be greater. The force of that point, which I have repeatedly made, was explicitly recognised by the Home Secretary in a discussion with me which took place on Radio 4 last November, which he acknowledged in his speech a few moments ago.

That draconian measure might actually lead to an increase in the risk to the public, and not a decrease, as we would all wish.

Mr. Thomas Graham (West Renfrewshire): The right hon. and learned Gentleman said, as the Opposition keep saying, that there are folk who will be driven underground and will take part in illegal activities with guns. Surely he is not encouraging folk to do that, once the House has taken a decision on .22 guns and high-calibre weapons. Let us remember why the debate came about: because of the tragic circumstances of Dunblane. People can be killed just as well by .22 guns. That is what the debate is about. I am surprised that the Opposition keep referring to folk going underground and acting illegally. We determine the law here. We shall give them 10 years in gaol if they are caught.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman knows very well that assertion of a proposition does not help to establish whether or not it is well founded. Of course no member of the Opposition is encouraging anyone to use pistols in a way that is prohibited by law. We are highlighting the danger that that might happen and, indeed, the Home Secretary acknowledged that it was a point with some force to it, which had to be weighed in the balance. Throughout history, that danger has often followed total prohibition. We should always take account of it and weigh it in the balance. It does not always carry the day, but we suggest that the potential consequences of the legislation should be taken seriously. For that and the other reasons that I have identified, we regard the legislation as unnecessary and unfair.

It is also expensive. One would not begrudge the money if the legislation meant increased protection for the public. However, as I have explained, there is no basis for that assertion. The Government have estimated that compensation would be likely to run to more than £30 million for weapons and their accessories. Where do the Government intend to find that money? The Home Secretary said that it will come from within existing Home Office budgets. What does that mean? Does it mean that expenditure on closed circuit television or on the police will be sacrificed in order to compensate law-abiding owners of lower-calibre handguns?

The Government might like to consider the following facts. The sum of £30 million could pay for the installation of several thousand closed circuit television cameras up and down the country. It also represents half the funding that police forces such as Wiltshire and Gloucestershire received in this financial year. It must surely be better to spend millions of pounds of taxpayers' money on more closed circuit television cameras or on the police than on compensation for law-abiding .22 calibre handgun owners.

Furthermore, there is good reason to suggest that the estimates in the financial memorandum to the Bill do not tell the whole story. During the passage of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill earlier this year, we decided against compensating gun clubs for the impact of a ban on high-calibre handguns. An important justification for that view was the fact that gun club members could continue to shoot .22 and lower-calibre pistols. A total ban on handguns would force many clubs—especially those whose members fire only handguns—to close. Does that not alter the previous position on compensation? Have the Government considered compensating clubs that will be forced to close as a direct result of the Bill?

When I put those questions to the Home Secretary, he said that he would re-examine the matter if the Bill departed in any way from the principles that informed our approach to the previous legislation. The argument is not that the Government are departing from those principles, but that the application of those principles will lead to different consequences as a result of the total ban on pistol shooting that this legislation provides. We need answers to those questions and I hope that the Minister of State will address them in his winding-up speech.

Mr. Beith: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made some well-founded comments about the Bill. However, he must recognise that some clubs were forced to contemplate closure under the previous legislation because they could not afford to implement costly security measures. Yet the right hon. and learned Gentleman refused those clubs' bid for compensation on that account.

Mr. Howard: I acknowledge that fact, but the current considerations are different. We debated that subject at great length during consideration of the previous legislation. At the time, I pointed to many precedents when the imposition of more stringent requirements under health and safety and similar legislation did not involve compensation. That proposition is entirely different from the one that I am putting now. Gun clubs will have to close as a consequence not of extra security requirements but of the fact that pistol shooting will no longer be permitted at all. That is an entirely different point and we look forward to hearing the Minister's response at the end of the day.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: My right hon. and learned Friend has put his finger exactly on the point. I have been told

of one club that has contracted to spend nearly £16,000 on security equipment in order to meet the requirements of the existing Act. Its owners will face bankruptcy if the legislation goes ahead and no compensation is paid.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point which deserves a serious response—it certainly does not deserve to be met with the hilarity that we observed on the Government Front Bench a moment ago.

The Opposition want to see firm gun controls in place. Like the Government, we are committed to ensuring that gun controls are rigorous and protect the public. Throughout our time in government, the Conservatives tightened gun controls when we found it necessary to do so, following due consideration. As a result, Britain has some of the world's toughest controls on the private possession of guns.

In 1982, we recognised the necessity of making it more difficult to possess imitation firearms that could be readily converted into working weapons. We changed the law so that the same tight licensing controls established by the Firearms Act 1968 applied to the imitation and to other dangerous firearms. In 1988, following the Hungerford tragedy in August 1987, we strengthened gun controls further. As a result, many of the most dangerous weapons—such as self-loading rifles and short-barrelled semi-automatic shotguns—were banned. We also strengthened controls on shotguns and on the safe keeping of all legally held firearms. Following the Dunblane tragedy in March last year and the completion of Lord Cullen's inquiry, we took the further action that is contained in the 1997 legislation.

The need to protect the public should be the main priority of any Home Secretary—it certainly was mine. Protecting the public from gun-related crime was a priority of the last Government. We took firm action not only to ensure that we had some of the toughest gun controls in the world, but to deal with the criminal misuse of illegally held firearms. For example, in the Criminal Justice Act 1988, we increased the maximum penalty for taking a gun to a crime from 14 years to life imprisonment. The Labour Opposition of the day opposed us virulently. The then shadow Home Secretary, now Lord Hattersley, described the provision as squalid and disreputable, and the present Prime Minister and Home Secretary voted against it.

It should be a cardinal principle of government that action taken to interfere with the liberty of the individual must be shown to have compelling justification. Clearly, there will frequently be room for argument as to whether such compelling justification exists. This legislation interferes with the liberty of the individual and no compelling justification for it has been demonstrated—indeed, none exists. The Bill is a prime example of the new Government's weakness for gesture politics. It is unnecessary and unfair, and that is why we shall oppose it.

5.16 pm

Mrs. Anne McGuire (Stirling): Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak so soon after making my maiden speech. As the parliamentary representative of the Stirling constituency and the town of Dunblane, I want to identify some of the legitimate opportunities of my constituents that were infringed on 13 March 1996. I wish to put the debate in some context, because I believe that it is a continuation of the unfinished debate from earlier this year.

Like many hon. Members, I wish I were not discussing this issue today. However, I think that we should remember exactly why we are doing so. Thomas Hamilton entered a primary school in Dunblane with four high-calibre guns and 473 bullets. He fired 106 shots, killing 16 children and their teacher and injuring 15 others. Only eight years before, a similar incident had taken place in the town of Hungerford. We must never forget the context of this debate.

We have been criticised for introducing an emotional element to the gun debate, but I remind hon. Members that emotion differentiates us from other species. We should never forget the strength of the human spirit. Time is a great healer, and it is sometimes easier to put the facts from our minds. However, I want hon. Members to reflect for a few moments on where they were on 13 March 1996. I want them to remember how that day developed and the way they felt.

At first, it seemed as though only one child—think about that—had been killed. However, the numbers soon increased and there was incredulity at how many children had been killed. We then witnessed the despair of parents, families and the whole community. I observed the House's reaction from outside and I was impressed by the way in which it empathised with the people of Dunblane on that day.

Since then, there have been many developments. For example, there was the Snowdrop petition, containing 750,000 signatures. It reflected the public opinion of which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary spoke. The Cullen inquiry took place and many of the Dunblane parents listened to the evidence that was presented to it. A momentum was created and hope increased, but we went only part of the way.

The previous Government's Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 certainly tightened regulations and imposed restrictions, but it left a lethal loophole. We know that .22 calibre guns are still in circulation under current legislation and it has been amply illustrated that these guns are not toys. The Police Federation's evidence to the Select Committee on Home Affairs confirmed that. The small-calibre single-shot handgun is as lethal as a larger-calibre gun. The loophole could still be exploited and, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, the British Shooting Sports Council highlighted that. The 1997 Act presented us with restrictions, but, at the same time, it put the pursuit of a minority who are involved in a sport above the protection of the public and their need and demand for public safety.

Labour's case in opposition was always that the House should establish a positive case for the possession of handguns. Two principal arguments are constantly advanced in trying to make that case. First, it is said that it is the individual, not the gun. Undoubtedly, Thomas Hamilton and Michael Ryan were evil and wicked people. They do not reflect honest, law-abiding citizens who shoot. We cannot legislate, however, for what an individual does with a gun. Lord Cullen identified that fact himself when he said that it is insufficient protection for the public merely to tackle the individual rather than the gun.

[Mrs. Anne McGuire]

Secondly, it is often argued that target shooting is an international sport. I do not know whether I am the only Member of this place who is appalled that we are setting a balance of four gold Olympic medals against the lives of children and adults in Hungerford and Dunblane.

We are challenged with the statement that we are discriminating against those who wish to shoot. I recognise the dedication of sports people and—

Mr. Howard: If the balance being struck was as the hon. Lady described, she would be entirely right. Would she not accept, however, that the first thing that must be established is that this proposed legislation will increase the protection of the public? In the absence of any compelling evidence that it will, it is legitimate to examine the other consequences of the Bill if it is enacted. That is the point.

Mr. Frank Cook: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not the convention of the House that no intervention is made during a maiden speech?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Lady is not making a maiden speech.

Mr. Cook: I apologise.

Mrs. McGuire: I thought that I made that clear at the beginning of my remarks.

I take up the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the shadow Home Secretary. I said at the beginning of my speech that today's debate was an extension of the one that took place earlier this year when the previous Government introduced a bad piece of legislation. I hope that tonight we shall see a real conclusion to the debate on guns and not the half-baked one that we had earlier in the year.

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): I was a Member of this place when, earlier in the year, it discussed the possession of handguns. I hoped that the Select Committee on Home Affairs would be able to give some guidance to the House. I remember the shock and horror following publication of the Select Committee report—it was forced through by Conservative Members—that opposed a total ban on handguns. I remember how that impacted on the people in Dundee whom I represent. Over the following six or seven weeks, a petition was organised in Dundee calling for a total ban on handguns to be introduced by the then Parliament. Over a short period, 6,000 people signed that petition. It was presented to my hon. Friend's predecessor, the then Secretary of State for Scotland, who did not even bother to reply. That illustrates the real reason why we got it wrong earlier. The then Government just did not care. They did not listen.

Mrs. McGuire: I agree with my hon. Friend. I suggest that many Conservative Members are entirely out of touch with the aspirations and wishes of ordinary people, which were reflected by my hon. Friend's constituents.

I recognise the wish of sports people to compete. I recognise also that they have rights in a democratic society. I assert, however, that their rights cannot and should not be put above the rights of others. I regret that their liberties will be infringed, but not as much as I regret the deaths of 16 children and their teacher in Dunblane on 13 March.

Life choices are still in front of the sports people who will have to give up pistol shooting. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, they can take up other shooting disciplines. They can take up hurdling, for example. They can do all sorts of other things and win gold medals for us in sports where those medals have not been won before. There are no choices left for the children who were killed in Dunblane or for the people killed in Hungerford.

One of the most moving comments that I heard was made by the mother of Mhairi Macbeth on the "Panorama" programme. She said that the tragedy was that she could not see the end of her child's story. I hope that today we can draw an end to the stories of those children who were killed.

We can be criticised for having an emotional response to what has happened. It is, however, an emotional issue when young people are shot down. Our emotional response is linked to a logical response, and that is to remove all handguns from our society.

Events, no matter how tragic, can often be used as a springboard to create a better world. That is our opportunity today, an opportunity which was missed earlier. Nothing can bring back the dead children and adults of Dunblane and Hungerford, but, by moving to extend the handgun ban, we can keep faith with them, with their families and with communities across Scotland and the United Kingdom as a whole who signed the Snowdrop petition and other petitions.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe, the shadow Home Secretary, said that we legislate when it is necessary to do so. That is the tragedy that we face, for we have legislated only when it was necessary to do so. I hope that tonight we shall legislate because we want to do something positive arising from two terrible tragedies.

5.27 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North–East Bedfordshire): The House will recognise that we have heard an utterly sincere speech from the hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), who represents Dunblane, which was devastated by the shooting tragedy. The hon. Lady and the Home Secretary have both recognised and sympathised with the shooters whose rights we shall take away. Both have recognised also that there must be a principle on which we base our approach. The principle has to be that it is necessary in the public interest, in this instance for the enhancement of public safety, to make the change that is set out in the Bill and that the Bill requires.

I listened most carefully to the Home Secretary's speech and I apologise to the right hon. Gentleman for seeking to intervene a second time. I wished only to highlight the point I am about to make. He did not really respond to the question whether the total banning of handguns, including the lighter .22 handguns, is necessary for public safety and whether it will significantly enhance public safety. I do not believe that that case has been made out.

The House recognises—the Home Secretary acknowledged this—that, even if we were to ban every gun in this country, including shotguns and rifles, and

even if we were to ban kitchen knives, we could not guarantee that the single-minded loner would never create an atrocity of the sort that we saw at Dunblane. It is not necessary to labour the point unduly, but it is one worth making. A gun does not have to feature in an atrocity. Poisons, although properly restricted, are obtainable; they are necessary, for example, in agriculture. An atrocity could occur through their use. As we know, tragically, from terrorism, it would be all to easy with the use of fertilisers, and household substances as simple as sugar, to destroy just as many lives in a moment of evil-minded atrocity. The same would be true—indeed, we very nearly saw it—of a machete. When dealing with small children, it is all too easy to kill.

The question that the House must address—I was deeply saddened that the Prime Minister allowed it to be raised in such a simplistic way at the end of Prime Minister's questions—is whether this measure is necessary and proportionate—

Mrs. McGuire: Yes.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: The hon. Lady says yes, but please address the issues.

Is the Bill really necessary and proportionate to protect the citizens of this country? I believe—I do not criticise the sincerity of any hon. Member—that the Bill is, understandably, an emotional response, which still remains following the horrific tragedy of Dunblane; but that does not make the case. The Prime Minister himself has said that he believes that the House has a moral responsibility to pass the Bill and that he has a personal belief, but neither he nor the Home Secretary has really addressed and made out the positive reasons for the ban.

One can become rather saddened in the House sometimes when there is a mood such as this. I am grateful to the hon. Members on the Government Benches who are here to take part in the debate, but most hon. Members will come and vote on a free vote not having heard the arguments. The very fact that the Government thought it right to make this a free vote points up the principle that I am highlighting. If the Government really believed that this measure is necessary and proportionate in the public interest, they would make it a Government measure. They would not simply leave it to a free vote, because—the Home Secretary is chatting to his hon. Friend, but he is serious minded about this—the Government say that they recognise that they have a duty to protect the rights of minorities. Unless the Government can show that passing this measure will significantly enhance the safety of the people of this country, they should not encourage their supporters and should not seek to persuade the House to pass this measure through a Government Bill. What happens on private Members' Bills is an entirely different matter.

I shall conclude by making one positive point and then give a summary. There is a very positive reason for not banning .22 pistols used by club members for target shooting. Properly monitored clubs are close-knit communities of highly responsible people. Every hon. Member who has spoken in the debate will probably recognise that. Such clubs exist in my constituency.

There are also small businesses—I know of one, to which I go from time to time because I shoot with a shotgun—that run pistol shooting in a highly responsible way. Those bodies monitor their members far more effectively than the police could ever be expected to do and provide a positive defence against oddballs such as Ryan and Hamilton—who were very odd indeed. Those bodies would be far more likely to spot such people and, if necessary, report them, rather than leaving it to an unfortunate police officer—I have the greatest sympathy with the police involved here—and asking the officer to deal with it on paper; and they would do that, not least because if any member of their club were to behave irresponsibly, he would endanger the licence of the club itself.

In summary, therefore, this is what the House is considering. Here we have a popular sport, an Olympic sport, a Commonwealth games sport, enjoyed and participated in by people who are recognised to be highly responsible. There is no real case that these comparatively light pistols are exceptionally dangerous or that they are any more dangerous than the other implements and substances that I mentioned. The use of such pistols by club members is closely licensed and monitored and is demonstrably responsible. It is not necessary in the public interest to ban them. There was indeed overwhelming political feeling following Dunblane, which led to the 1997 Act which introduced a regime that is already more draconian in its controls and more stringent than those that exist almost anywhere else in the world. Nothing further will be gained in public security by a complete ban. As is now widely recognised, we in Parliament have, in these circumstances, a duty to protect the liberties of our constituents and the rights of minorities.

I ask the House in all sincerity at the very least to suspend judgment, to give the 1997 Act a chance to succeed, and not, on careful reflection, to give the Bill a Second Reading tonight.

5.35 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I have in my hand some correspondence to a constituent from a Member of the House who knows of my intention to refer to it and who sits on the Opposition Benches. It might be an appropriate starting point for our discussions tonight, which I am hoping will be sensible and sober and will have a bit of logic about them, which has been in short supply in the past.

The letter, which is dated 17 February, says:

"There is, to be honest, little that I can now do to prevent this legislation being enacted, but I am anxious to ensure that your own views are noted at the highest possible level. To that end I think that the best thing that I can do at this stage is to write to the Prime Minister . . . to take up with him the important points which you raise."

A handwritten postscript says:

"P.S. I was saddened to learn that you will not be supporting me in the General Election. I am a Conservative but have reflected in my vote and my contacts with Ministers the view that we share on this issue. It seems strange to me that I should be "punished" for so doing!"

The constituent replied:

"Let me stress please that I do appreciate"

what you have done.

"Further, I fully agree that it is unfair that you should be 'punished' for the actions of others with whom you do not agree.

However, you must forgive me if I say that I feel great empathy with you. I too, along with thousands of others involved in shooting

are being punished in a very real sense for the actions of one lunatic and the failings of one senior policeman. We too think such retribution very unfair".

We feel

"totally betrayed by this spiteful and vengeful legislation. To be so punished without adequate compensation is iniquitous."

I shall make plain my interest in this legislation. I am a qualified schoolteacher; I taught for many years. I am a grandfather. I have seven grandchildren and one adopted grandchild. I am also a trustee and director of the Lucy Faithfull Foundation. Lucy Faithfull—Baroness Faithfull—formed a foundation, with my help and that of a number of others, to care for children's welfare and to counter child abuse of a sexual and physical kind, a matter that is close to my heart. Lucy died the day that Dunblane happened. Some say that she had been called early to greet the children at the gates of heaven. That is a terribly emotional statement, but there might be some truth in it.

I have become involved in this because of media focus on the fact that I also happen to be, for my sins, honorary pistol captain of the Palace of Westminster Rifle Club. I am not a shooter. With a rifle, I am a little above average. With a pistol or revolver—I do not like the term handgun, as it is an American expression—I am moderately safe. Notice that I say "safe", because one of the things about gun clubs is that they train people to handle firearms safely: not to point them, whether loaded or not, at other people. They must conform to range discipline. They must obey the qualified range officer. They must undergo a period of probation and be subject to approval by qualified club officers.

By reason of my being honorary pistol captain—incidentally I have never owned or wanted to own a firearm and I have never sought a firearms certificate—the media concentrated their attention on me.

Another of my qualifications is that I acted as Opposition Whip on what I choose to call the Hungerford Bill. I remember the times and the arguments that we had on that Bill. I see that other Members who took part in those proceedings with me are present and they will remember them just as clearly. We appealed to the Government of the day to listen to a range of anomalies related to firearms legislation generally. The strange thing about the Hungerford Bill was that it did not touch the subject of handguns—there, I have used the term. More than half the killings at Hungerford were conducted with a 9 mm Beretta automatic. That Bill never touched 9 mm Berettas.

Those shortfalls were pointed out to the Government of the day. The Bill was guillotined by the Government and 67 clauses were not debated, not because of the Labour opposition but because of the opposition of Conservative Members. There were objections and, by one means or another, an arrangement was made that if we could not debate those clauses we would express our opinion by going through the Division Lobby. That evening, 18 Opposition Members—I was one of them—kept 140 Conservative Members in the House until about 9 o'clock the next morning.

Many of the Members who have been present in the House since 1987 and are now expressing grave concerns about circumstances and incidents that have taken place since, were not here that night. That is how much concern they showed about Hungerford in those days—but not me, and not some of my colleagues, so I want no one to question my qualifications to talk on this topic.

I have every sympathy with the parents of Dunblane, for God's sake. It was a horrendous experience. If I seriously thought for one second that by enacting this legislation we would obviate another incident of that kind, I would have signed the Snowdrop petition months ago. If I thought that that could be achieved by banning handguns, by completely removing guns from Britain, by God, I would be leading the charge to do that. But, frankly, that is not happening.

What is happening is a great diversion of attention away from the serious issues behind the circumstances. The relationship between Thomas Watt Hamilton and the police in central Scotland was a distinctly unhealthy one, and I want to say why. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary stated today that the guns held by Thomas Watt Hamilton were lawfully held. We know for a fact that Michael Ryan at Hungerford held illegal weapons. The police knew but did not act.

There is incontrovertible evidence, which I will provide to anyone who wishes to hear it, that Thomas Watt Hamilton's first firearms certificate was illegal. The statements on it were incorrect, inaccurate and unchecked by the police. The first purchase of a firearm was illegal, so any renewal and change of weapon was, by definition, illegal, because the renewals are based on the veracity and validity of the first purchase.

We also know that Thomas Watt Hamilton had threatened a woman with a loaded firearm through the open window of his stationary vehicle and that he was admonished by the police. My God, can hon. Members imagine that—admonished? Why on earth was he not dragged in and his certificate and weapons removed? Everyone knew that he was a danger and a liar. There was unforgivable negligence and we must recognise that.

We also know that Sergeant Hughes, the firearms inquiry officer, had made inquiries about Hamilton's character, personality and conduct. He pleaded with his senior officers to authorise the removal of the weapons and certificates and he was ignored—ignored because, he said, the senior police officer was afraid that if he was taken to a court of law on appeal he would not be able to make the case stick. That is a problem for the Scottish Office. It is a problem which the Scottish Office and Scottish police ignored, which resulted in Dunblane.

Now, sadly, there has been a combination of cosmetic electoral competition, which has obfuscated the real issue. The Labour party said, understandably, that it wanted to ban .38s. The Home Secretary of the day said that the Government would do that. That was an equation. An election was coming up and it was not going to be enough, so we had to go one better and we did, and we have never stopped competing since. That is the wrong way to implement legislation.

The statutory requirements of United Kingdom law with regard to firearms were not applied in Hungerford and have not been applied in Dunblane. The Cullen inquiry was misled on those facts. The evidence is there to be checked. I ask in all seriousness: if the police can fail to such an extent in Hungerford and Dunblane, how can we trust them to implement to the letter the legislation that the House seeks to enact today?

I come now to a document that has been supplied to every hon. Member by the Gun Control Network. I do not know a great deal about the GCN. I understand that one hon. Member is linked with its organisers and I should

like seriously to discuss with that hon. Member some of its activities. However, I want to comment on the document, and some of what I say will relate to points that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made this afternoon.

Point one concerns the logic. It is said that .22 weapons are well known to be the favoured assassins' gun and are the preferred weapon of many secret services around the world. The Home Secretary made a similar point this afternoon. I invite hon. Members to put themselves in the position of the Jackal going out to do the job. Can anyone imagine him checking the place where the person will be, the time that he will arrive and the point and field of fire, and then saying, "Oh heavens, I can't use this because its illegal"? Can anyone seriously put that forward as being logical? It devalues the case that we are trying to make.

The second point says that shooters and manufacturers seek to exploit loopholes. I have news for the House. The shooters and traders whom I know are the most law-abiding people one could encounter. The Palace of Westminster Rifle Club is the only club in the Palace of Westminster to abide by the law as it exists outside in the country. We can drink here to our hearts' content rather than be thrown out of a pub. We can do virtually what we like, but not on the rifle range. On the rifle range, we do as we are bloody well told and according to the qualified range officer.

There are 4 million illegal guns out there. Anyone can obtain an illegal gun in under 60 minutes and for less than 60 quid. They may not be very accurate or of any use to a target shooter, and they are certainly no good in a gun club, but they are every bit as lethal, and they are obtainable in far less time than it takes to manufacture pistol components and barrels of revolvers. The arguments used against dismantlement are farcical. People can obtain illegal guns and the ammunition to go with them as easy as that. Furthermore, those illegal guns are not registered. If they are found, they cannot be traced back, whereas a legal gun can be.

On security, transport and identification, the document says that there is a real difficulty in distinguishing .22s from other handguns. The Home Secretary also made that point. He referred to the distinction between .38s and .22s, and said that such a distinction would be unenforceable. He did not want to accept it because it would be unenforceable. Please tell me how enforceable this legislation will be, given that there are 4 million illegal weapons on the streets. Sloppy logic is being used. Hon. Members should consider their duty to enact legislation that is enforceable and achievable. We are in danger of failing to do that.

Mr. William Ross (East Londonderry): I was on the Committee that considered the Bill to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Does he agree that if some of the amendments that were proposed at that time had been accepted, the horrors of Dunblane might have been avoided, because the person concerned might have been identified by the police, who could then have taken action earlier? A man was murdered in Belfast today. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is extremely unlikely that he, like the many hundreds of others who have died in Northern Ireland at the hands of terrorists, was slaughtered with legal weapons? Nor were they shot by .22s. Terrorists and people out to kill folk use the heaviest calibre weapons and the most lethal ammunition that they can lay their hands on. Far too much nonsense is being talked in the House on this subject.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because he amplifies my points. I fully agree about what might have happened had amendments been accepted at that time. I remind the Home Secretary that, during the previous debate on this issue, I raised nine points related to firearms legislation that could have been included in previous legislation but were not. I was told that they could have been tabled as amendments. Have they been included in this Bill? No, they have not. How serious are we about sorting out the whole business of firearms legislation? If we are to do the job, let us do it properly. My mother used to say to me that if a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well. That thought just returned to me.

The document makes the point that Thomas Hamilton and Michael Ryan both had legal handguns: the Home Secretary called them "lawfully held". That is impossible, and the evidence is quite clear on that. The document says:

"The vast majority of the population wish to see them prohibited completely."

I shall try to explain to the House what the population knows about firearms legislation.

A MORI poll was conducted less than a month ago. People were asked whether they knew how to obtain a gun licence. It was a straightforward question: nothing complex. Three per cent. got it right, 39 per cent. got it hopelessly wrong and 58 per cent. had the good sense to say that they had not got a clue. According to that sample of 850 people over 18, 3 per cent. of people have some idea of how to obtain a gun licence.

I ask hon. Members to consider on what basis people make their judgments on these matters. It is our business to inform ourselves and to make ourselves aware of the real position. The fact that a number of hon. Members are not listening to the arguments and have not had any briefings hardly gives us confidence that our decisions will be taken on the basis of illumination and light.

I should like to refer briefly to Monday's debate on compensation. In his winding-up speech, the Minister of State responded to some of my points. He has told me that he will write to me, and I am grateful to him for that. I hope that his letter arrives before Monday's Committee stage, because I may have to raise these issues again.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): It will.

Mr. Cook: Thank you. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. On Monday, referring to me, he said:

"My hon. Friend referred to the possibility of claiming for components of expanding ammunition."

I was talking about both standard and expanding ammunition.

"That is not part of our proposal. That was a suggestion from the gun trade that the Home Office undertook to consider. It was not advice that the Home Office gave to the trade. My hon. Friend based his remarks on a misunderstanding of the consultation that has taken place."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. 918.]

I must inform the Minister of a telephone conversation—I have already given the Home Secretary advance notice

[Mr. Cook]

of this additional information. I have a communication from Bill Hulse, sales director of Edgar Brothers, which says:

"the following is my clear and exact recollection of part of the conversation which took place between myself and . . . the Firearms Industry Compensation Group at a meeting with Simon Barrat and Chris Potter at the Home Office on Wednesday 28 May last.

I asked very specifically whether we could claim compensation for the components of an assembled round. Messrs Barrat and Potter conferred then Simon Barrat confirmed that this was the case. There was no implied or stated wording that this issue was to be considered.

As the rest of this and all previous meetings have been both amicable, positive and constructive I can only assume that Messrs Barrat and Potter are mistaken in their recollection. If so, this is one more example of the incomplete and ambiguously worded compensation scheme causing as many problems to the authors and administrators as it does to the victims.

The simple solution would be for another meeting between ourselves, the Home Office and the Minister responsible to clarify and resolve the ambiguity . . . which it is in everybody's interest to implement effectively."

I once more put the question to the Minister: for heaven's sake, can we not re-examine the schedule, even at this late stage?

Much has been made of police consultation and the clarity of the instructions that they have been given. The Metropolitan police firearms inquiry team phoned me for clarification. I referred them to the Home Office, but they had already spoken to the Home Office and could not get clarification. I then spoke to the Clerk of the House, who told me that Royal Assent was on a certain date, and he thought that it would be simply a matter of time. The Minister was helpful in telling me that the Government want to implement both Acts simultaneously. That is an example of the police's lack of clarity.

I should like to give another example of the police's lack of clarity. I have the transcript of a telephone conversation between the secretary of the Loughton Hall rifle club and an officer of a firearms inquiry team, whom I shall not identify for obvious reasons. It took place at 11 am on 6 June 1997.

Talking to the secretary, the police officer said:

"Right, well when the new law for clubs comes in on 1st July it won't be allowed to have any weapons in unoccupied premises".

The secretary asked:

"What, not even rifles?",

to which the answer was:

"No".

So not only will we require secure gun clubs, we will require them to be occupied. Presumably there will be numerous caretakers.

The Home Secretary has emphasised, not for the first time, that a free vote will take place tonight. I have to say that I hope that that vote will be a good deal freer than the previous vote. We had a free vote a couple of months ago, but two senior members of the shadow Cabinet were shepherding people who had not been party to the debate and had not listened to the arguments into the Lobby of their choice.

I lost my temper at that point, and registered the fact with both those Members, so the news will come as no surprise to anybody in the House. In fact, somebody dashed off to the press, whose representatives promptly got on to me but I refused to speak to them.

In the House of Commons we have not only free votes but free speech, and I shall watch the performance this evening to see whether there really is a free vote. There is a three-line Whip on attendance, and there are all sorts of ways of giving semaphore signals about who wants who to go where. Thank goodness that all the Government positions have already been filled.

I tabled an amendment, but, as it has not been selected, I cannot move it. None the less, I shall speak briefly to it, because I have been informed that two major Commonwealth countries are poised and ready to object to the holding of the Commonwealth games in Manchester in five years' time.

I checked with Manchester, and apparently Manchester is "comfortably confident" that it will still stage the games. I am happy about that. The last thing that I want is to see the Commonwealth games removed from Manchester. That is why I am raising the question.

Mr. Michael: I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would be very careful about the words that he uses on that issue. He will have heard the Home Secretary make it absolutely clear how discretion will be used, and what advice he has received on the law. That means that there will be no threat to the Commonwealth games in Manchester. Indeed, as a Member of Parliament representing the north-west, my right hon. Friend is keen to see the games come there. It would not be in the interests of Manchester, of the north-west, or of this country as a whole, for any doubt to be cast on the likelihood of the games coming to Manchester, because there should be no doubt.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the Minister of State; that is helpful and in line with the comments that he made on Monday, when he mentioned a dispensation. I was grateful then, too. But I must speak openly. If I kept quiet and afterwards something happened, people would say, "You should have spoken out." That would probably make me want to top myself, so I have to put my thoughts to the House in this form.

The Commonwealth games may well come to Manchester, but, in five years' time, if the Bill is enacted, we shall not have qualified and experienced judges able to conduct the proceedings.

Mr. Robathan: The hon. Gentleman is making a typically courageous speech. As he is on the subject, would he also like to comment on the impact that he thinks this unfortunate Bill will have on future bids for the Olympics, whether by Manchester or anywhere else in this country?

Mr. Cook: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his uncharacteristically complimentary remarks directed at me.

Mr. Michael: You should be worried.

Mr. Cook: I probably shall be later, when the retribution sets in. Perhaps the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) will let me finish the first part of what I was saying first.

We shall not have qualified experienced judges and assessors to stage the competitions, so we shall have to borrow them. No doubt the same would apply to the Olympics.

Can we imagine several countries bidding for the next event and saying, "We shall put so many million pounds into building this stadium, that sports hall and this swimming pool, and we shall have 74 different disciplines," to which we would respond, "We shall do that too, but by the way, we have something extra. We have a dispensation that will allow your competitors to come to our country and participate in a sport that we have made illegal"?

That idea is so preposterous that it is farcical. Other nations would have a field day. As I said, two major Commonwealth countries are waiting, very interested and focused, poised to make representations should we pass the Bill. Now we see the impact of it.

If we do not make provision for target shooters to train, we shall not be able to enter a team anyway. Already today the Home Secretary has shown us, in a blunt riposte to the proposal, despite the fact that it was a serious proposal put by sporting organisations, that there is no concern about that.

With the utmost respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), who is not now in her place, it is grossly unfair to try to measure a number of gold medals against a number of children killed.

Let me explain the difference. Albie s a Welsh international shooter in free .22 pistol. H is ex-Royal Navy and ex-Royal Air Force commission, an instructor on search-and-rescue helicopters, with awards for bravery. He has participated in international shooting events many times, and will continue to do so, because he will go abroad.

The gun that Albie Fox uses is single-shot, and it takes him almost two minutes to load the thing. It is a counterweighted pistol with a long barrel, which he shoots at a piece of paper 50 m away, in which the bull is about the size of the ring that I am making now with my finger and thumb. That man will be denied the opportunity to practise, train and compete at the discipline for which he has won awards.

Jim Fox came to the House this morning for a press conference. He is a gold medal-winning pentathlete who has represented this country at .22 in four Olympics and 10 world championships. He is a model of respectability, as is every serious member of the shooting confraternity. Notice that I do not use the phrase, "gun culture".

Gun culture is on the television. It is in Moss Side and Vauxhall; it is in Birmingham, Liverpool and now, sadly, in Newcastle too. That is gun culture. The shooting confraternity punches holes in cardboard at a range of 25 m to 50 m.

My party now seems to be backing off on hunting, and easing up on the anti-hunting argument. That is sad, and I am disappointed to see it. I shall fight that, too, by the way. It seems strange that while we are easing off on an activity in which people pursue defenceless creatures across the countryside and allow them to be torn to pieces, we want to forbid people to put holes in pieces of cardboard at a range of 25 m. I do not see the logic in that.

Thomas Hamilton was thrown out of gun clubs. His membership was refused, because he was considered undisciplined and dangerous. If Sergeant Hughes's comments on that subject had been heeded by senior officers, Hamilton would never have been able to commit his crime at Dunblane.

One of the points that I raised the other evening is that we are talking about 160,000 large-calibre weapons, and now about 40,000 .22s. The police arrived at those numbers by counting the weapons covered by firearms certificates so that, as far as individual shooters in this country are concerned, there is a degree of accuracy. The figures take no account of guns in stock at dealers. Guns are not like second-hand cars—they cannot be traded in, trashed up, thrown into a furnace or rejigged. Second-hand guns are held by dealers because someone might legally want them.

It is estimated that about 70,000 to 80,000 large-calibre weapons are held by dealers. They are kept on registers in shop reserves, and are covered by summary certificates. We are talking about 70,000 to 80,000 guns, on top of the 160,000 large-calibre weapons. That will mean a major change in compensation requirements, and a similar situation applies to the 40,000 .22s to which I have referred. The necessary expenditure has been gravely underestimated.

Compensation is due to be paid only for those components, weapons and supplies that were in the owner's possession on or before 16 October 1996. I should not have to remind the House that, since that date, people might have switched from a .38 to a .22, thinking that the legislation would allow them to continue shooting. They might have knocked over and damaged a telescope and had to replace it. A change in weapon would require a change in ammunition—all required after 16 October. Will those people be penalised for buying after the set date? What does new Labour intend for this new measure?

I finish by repeating my pleas of the past. I have always said that the law is unenforceable, and I think that it is illogical and unjustified. Shooting in clubs is very much a family sport, and I have heard mothers pleading with me in tears that a ban on shooting would interfere with the routine of their family's activity. If I thought that enacting this legislation would make Jack the Lad stay at home instead of going out and doing a bank robbery or knocking off a post office, I would have signed the Snowdrop petition months ago.

6.12 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick–upon–Tweed): We have heard reminders of the grim and awful event that set in train this series of measures, and of the Cullen inquiry which followed it. I wish to go back to that for a moment.

The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997—brought in by the previous Government following the Cullen report—introduced a number of good things, for which some of us had been arguing for a long time. There was much more vigorous control of the issuing of licences, which could even have been carried out to some extent under the law as it was. The recommendations of the report and features of the legislation will make that system much better. I voted for the Act on Third Reading—and recommended that my hon. Friends do the same—particularly because I wanted that tightening of the licensing system.

The previous Government then took the decision not to accept Lord Cullen's proposal for the dismantling of handguns, but argued instead for a partial ban, amounting to about 80 per cent. of handguns. We had a free vote on the issue, as we will tonight on the proposed 100 per cent.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

ban. Let us remember what the Act has resulted in. When it comes into effect, no handgun can be held at home, and no handgun can be in a club except .22s and below, and only then in the very few clubs that can meet the tighter restrictions necessary if they want to have handguns at all. The legislation made a number of important changes.

The partial ban itself had very few friends. It was criticised by those who wanted a total ban and by those who believed that a ban was unjustified and lacked a certain internal logic. Those who wanted the ban to be complete—including a significant number of my hon. Friends—can now vote that it should be so, except for the very particular exemptions provided for by the previous legislation for vets and others. The opportunity is here today and I make no criticism of the Government for bringing the opportunity forward.

I shall argue in a moment that I will vote for the reasoned amendment, although there is one word in it with which I do not agree—the claim that it is "intemperate" to bring the Bill forward. It is not intemperate—it is logical. Labour said before the election that it would create the opportunity for a free vote and that is what should happen tonight. I shall give my view in a moment, but it is a matter on which the Liberal Democrats will not have a party line.

Where we do have a party line—because we are in such strong agreement—is on the belief that the new ban further strengthens the case for adequate compensation for those who will suffer as a result. That particularly applies to clubs, and to trustees of clubs who could face crippling personal liabilities because they have entered into loans and mortgages to make the changes that would have been necessary to allow their club to participate in the legal .22 shooting for which the previous legislation made provision. Severe personal liability could be incurred by club officers and trustees.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) criticised the Government's attitude, in that the Bill makes a significant change and will result in gun clubs having to close because there is no provision for pistol shooting at all. The business compliance cost assessment which accompanies the Bill and which has been issued by the Government states:

"Gun clubs which cater solely or mainly for target pistol shooting will probably have to close."

It follows that the financial losses and liabilities that result ought to be a matter for compensation and we will table amendments to the Bill to seek that such compensation should be provided.

When the shadow Home Secretary made that point, I criticised him because there were implications for clubs in his own legislation that he did not accept or follow. Clubs and many businesses involved in this area were bound to suffer from a situation in which only very few clubs would be able to continue any form of handgun or pistol shooting.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman made no provision for compensation for them—indeed, he steadfastly refused to countenance any such compensation—yet it was clear that, once the restriction became so severe, many people would say, "I cannot afford to get into .22 pistol shooting. I will give up altogether." That was recognised by the previous Government in response to a plea that we made at the time.

We said that, once the restrictions came into force, those people who owned .22s or smaller weapons would have guns that they could not shoot anywhere near them, because no club was equipped to do so, but would not be entitled to compensation, because the guns were not illegal. The ex gratia scheme was introduced in response to that plea and I welcome it, as a transitional provision, if the Bill is passed.

It was clearly wrong and unreasonable for people to suffer the almost complete loss in the value of something for which they paid a lot of money, because it was effectively unusable throughout much of the country. The same applied to the clubs and the previous Home Secretary should have seen the logic of that and accepted the case for compensation.

I make that point to the present and previous Governments and we shall be tabling amendments to that effect. Later in the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) will hope to take part and—as an experienced pistol shooter—will seek to make the case for a total ban much more eloquently than I will be able to do. That gives me the opportunity to set out my view, because it is representative of that of some of my hon. Friends.

We were all appalled by Dunblane. Some said afterwards that we owed it to the children to ban all handguns, but legislation on such a matter is not a memorial to the victims of evil or a way of venting our anger at the terrible thing that was done; it is a mechanism which limits the freedom of individuals and must therefore be judged according to whether the restrictions are justified and effective. That is an essential liberal principle. We must make up our minds how far the Bill satisfies that condition.

What will be taken away is the opportunity to engage in legitimate .22 target shooting as a sport, not only nationally but internationally, because British competitors will not be able to train unless the Home Secretary, as I urged, uses the dispensation more widely than he intends and makes some provision for authorised British participants. That would never be ideal from a sporting point of view, because entry into the sport would be so restricted, but it would be a small gesture that he could make if he were serious about ensuring that the competitions can take place in the Manchester Commonwealth games.

Britain is successful in both Olympic and Commonwealth games shooting and shooting by disabled people, about which hon. Members will have received representations. There is a strong feeling among the disabled people who use pistol shooting as a sport that the ban is a severe deprivation for them.

My view is that the legislation will not stop the determined criminal or psychopath, who can use other weapons or obtain handguns from criminal sources perfectly easily. My personal conclusion is that a total prohibition of .22 pistols kept in clubs would not make a significant contribution to public safety such as would justify or necessitate the severe limitations imposed on innocent citizens who want to pursue a perfectly legitimate sporting activity under strict regulation.

Mr. Hawkins: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the impact of the proposals on disabled sport. Will he

confirm that powerful representations have been made to me and to many other hon. Members by the British paraplegic pistol shooters, who have been conspicuously successful at recent Paralympics?

Mr. Beith: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned them, because their representations are among those that I had in mind when I mentioned disabled shooters. The House should give consideration to that group of people.

I hope that all hon. Members will apply the test of whether they can be convinced that the restrictions in the Bill on those who legitimately engage in .22 pistol shooting are justified and necessary and will greatly increase public safety. My judgment is that they will not.

6.22 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Before proceeding to the heart of this fundamental debate, I must, in my maiden speech, tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about my wonderful constituency and my predecessors. I must also express my gratitude and acknowledge some debts.

I am privileged and proud to be here. I am the first Member of Parliament in my family; the first in the new constituency of Lancaster and Wyre; the first Labour Member ever in one part of my constituency; and only the second in the other. I am grateful to the people of what, from my accent, is clearly my adopted constituency, for returning me. I am determined to repay their faith, hope and trust with immense hard work. I aim to enable the voices of people from Lancaster and Wyre to be heard here and I aim to help to bring home to them the benefits of what I am confident will be a great reforming Government.

My constituency covers large parts of two districts, with two health authorities, and I have two immediate predecessors. Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman represented Lancaster for 27 years, and retired undefeated and unbowed at the Dissolution of Parliament this year. She was a remarkable Member of Parliament, with a strong following at home. She is a person of courage and principle. We disagreed on almost everything—on whether the sun was shining—but no one could doubt her tenacity, sincerity, strongly held commitment and work over those 27 years. I am sure that all hon. Members will join me in wishing her a long, healthy and happy retirement.

Lancaster joined with Wyre to make my constituency. Keith Mans was Member of Parliament for Wyre for 10 years, from 1987. He was my opponent at the general election. Again, there were many areas of disagreement between us, but I found him a decent, honourable and able man. Our personal relations were invariably cordial, and usually friendly. He served his constituency well and even though he has promised me that he will be back, I wish him and his family well in all that the future holds for them. I am sure that the House will echo that.

I have worked hard to get here. I have had such a feeling for Lancaster that I have thought for a long time that I would eventually arrive here. Perhaps uniquely on this occasion, I believe that I can say without fear of interruption that Lancaster is the finest historic city in the land. The Queen, after all, is the Duke of Lancaster, and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) is the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

"Time-honoured Lancaster", in Shakespeare's words, has a Roman fort and a royal castle; it is the county town of the old county of Lancashire. Why should we not rise again as the administrative centre of regional government? We are significant. We have meaning. We stretch back over millennia. We have a moral tradition. We have a Roman Catholic cathedral, and an ancient priory church. We have a Quaker tradition. Our churches are ecumenical and alive.

We have a world-class university and a revered college of education. We have the oldest functioning prison in Europe and a model youth custody centre. It is unfortunate that the shadow Home Secretary is no longer here; Lancaster people could tell him how far prison works.

Lancaster is a beautiful city in lovely surroundings, a city of culture where music, literature, theatre, dance and the visual arts combine with our relatively small and compact size to make Lancaster the capital of cultural participation, offering more opportunities per head than anywhere else in the land.

Laurence Binyon—appropriately for this debate, the poet of remembrance—comes from my adopted city. I come from the east coast, from Northumberland, and I have loved Lancaster since the day that I arrived there. Seventeen years on, with one daughter born there and 10 years of hard work throughout Lancaster and Wyre, I love it all.

I love the market town of Garstang; the larger town of Poulton-Le-Fylde; Thornton; Preesall; Knott End; and the villages of Stalmine, Calder Vale, Cockerham, Winmarleigh, Pilling, Caton, Catterall, Brookhouse, Hambleton, Quernmore, Glasson Dock, Scorton, Forton, Bilsborrow and Barton—lovely names that roll off the tongue. We have lovely names and fine countryside: wild fells and river valleys, wild places, wildlife and cityscapes, rich farmland, marshes and the sea. My constituents include fine people who have lived there all their lives and those who have come to enjoy and benefit from the place. Every autumn, thousands of young people, full of creativity and vitality, come to learn there. It is exciting, it is fun, and the whole constituency is great.

Of course, we have problems galore. We have an animal rendering plant which blights the future and which must go. Our young people need jobs, and our pensioners need security and good care. Those fine rural towns and villages must provide affordable homes. We need heavy goods off the roads and on to rail. We need a good bus service restored.

We have one of the largest concentrations of park home residents in the country and the law needs to be reformed to give them security and tranquillity in their quiet years. Our excellent schools can be improved, our quality health service can develop and grow, and our environment needs to be sustained. The people must be listened to, their experience valued, their expertise utilised and their views solidly reflected in debate, including the debate today.

The greatest joy of my life has been to see our children grow up. They are 19 and 16 now. I have worked with families and children for more than 15 years and I can think of nothing more heinous, wicked or evil than the murder of all those bairns and their teacher in Dunblane. We must never allow that to happen again. We have taken action and banned weapons. We have reformed procedures, strengthened security at schools and increased vigilance. We must be ever vigilant and alert, and we must do all we can.

[Mr. Hilton Dawson]

Yet today, we are tempted to go too far and to miss the point. Like everyone here, I have talked to people about this subject for months and heard differing views. Indeed, I sat in my office this morning and held a phone-in for my constituents. I was there for 19 hours—I am sorry, I mean two hours, it just seemed like 19—and 19 people rang in. As soon as I put the phone down, it rang again.

I have also searched my soul and my conscience on this issue. I do not doubt the obvious sincerity of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and everyone who has taken part in the debate. However, I cannot believe that the extreme circumstances that occurred at Dunblane can lead to good law. I profoundly believe that the House of Commons is here to protect the freedom of law-abiding individuals to go about their business and to explore their talents.

Target shooting as a sport is something at which elderly people and people with disabilities can excel. It is an outlet for their skills and they often have few others. I am worried about civil liberties and the quality of our democracy when patently decent people feel that their sport and their livelihoods are being sacrificed and their views ignored to no avail. Those involved in target shooting feel that the Bill will not address the real problems caused by illegal guns in our society.

I hold no brief for shooting. It does not interest me as a sport and I miss by miles at fairgrounds. I am concerned about the increase in illegal guns, in violent crime, in drug-related criminal behaviour and the use of firearms by vicious criminals. We must tackle those problems—I am sure that every hon. Member wants to tackle them—but they have nothing to do with adding further restrictions to the lives of thoroughly decent and utterly law-abiding ordinary people.

We must take time to reflect. The memory of those tragically murdered 16 bairns and their teacher could be better honoured by developing a culture in this country that puts children's rights and needs at the forefront of our concern. We must make some real progress in helping children and their families out of poverty, and in radically improving the lot of children in public care, which is an issue close to my heart. By providing quality services for all children, we could start putting children first in all policy areas. That is an issue for another debate.

It is a tribute to the good grace, sense and wisdom of the Government that a free vote will be held on this issue. It is a fundamental matter of civil liberties and of conscience. I intend to take full advantage of the free vote and, for once, I will not vote with the Government. I cannot vote for the Bill, because I am not convinced that it will provide overwhelming benefits for public safety.

6.35 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) on an eloquent contribution. I look forward to the many contributions that he will make in the four and a half years that he has ahead of him in this place, before my former hon. Friends return to the Government Benches with the rest of my party.

I rise for the first time in a debate with some trepidation, following as I do a long tradition of distinguished Conservative Members of Parliament for North Wiltshire. My constituency can claim a record for continuity and longevity, because all my three predecessors—stretching back to 1941—are still alive. I challenge other hon. Members to equal that record if they can. David Eccles won a by-election in 1941, when he took over from Captain Cazalet, who was killed piloting General Sikorski in the war. David Eccles served for nearly 20 years and was replaced by one of the great gentlemen of the House, Daniel Awdry, who served from 1962 until he handed the baton to Richard Needham in 1979. Richard made a huge contribution to the nation in the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Trade and Industry. His wit and his particular brand of directness will be much missed by the House. I hope that I am able to follow in that worthy tradition—if not as a lookalike, at least as well as I can.

I am honoured and fortunate to have been elected for such a beautiful constituency as North Wiltshire. It represents, in the words of the English prayer book, the "unchanging changelessness" of rural England, and straddles the industrial prosperity of the M4 corridor. The constituency contains the most beautiful villages in England, including Lacock and Castle Combe, and pleasant market towns, including Malmesbury, Chippenham, Corsham and Wootton Bassett. Those four towns house some of the finest businesses in England. The fastest growing business in Europe, I am told, is Dyson, which manufactures bagless vacuum cleaners in Malmesbury. They are first-class.

North Wiltshire is no longer the rural idyll that some hon. Members might imagine. More than half my constituents live in towns. None the less, the whole character of the place derives from the fact that it is in the countryside. Even people who live on modern estates in Chippenham believe that they are countrymen, and their way of life is heavily influenced by the countryside.

Many of us are deeply concerned by two or three aspects of life in the countryside at the moment. Farmers have faced the most desperate 18 months in the history of modern agriculture thanks to the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis. I very much hope that the Government, who are so proud of their close links and great power in the European Union, will be able to lift the EU beef ban as soon as they can. I have yet to hear any promises or aspirations from the Government on that front, but they must take urgent action to lift the ban.

I very much welcome the announcement that the Government made last week about banning the import of beef from possibly dodgy abattoirs on the continent of Europe. I shall make just two comments on that. The Government might consider bringing that ban forward to today's date on the ground that if they leave it until the end of July, there is a risk that those dodgy abattoirs, as I like to call them, will choose to pour beef into this country in the interim.

The Government might also consider using the excellent vets from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who tour British abattoirs and ensure that our beef is of the highest quality. They might be asked to go to the continent to inspect the abattoirs whence we shall be importing beef. I suspect that imports of beef into the United Kingdom would go down quite considerably and that even huge users such as McDonald's, which I believe is the largest user of beef in this country, might think twice about their determination to import everything that

they use from the continent. Many hon. Members know that British beef is best, and it is high time that McDonald's and others realised the same.

Another threat to an area such as North Wiltshire arises from the possibly controversial activity of field sports. The economy of my constituency would be deeply damaged by any ban on field sports as a whole, but particularly damaged by a fox hunting ban. About £4 billion is contributed to the British economy thanks to field sports, about 50,000 horses are kept purely for the purpose of fox hunting and about 15,500 foxhounds would have to be destroyed if fox hunting were banned—incidentally, vastly greater than the number of foxes that are killed in any one year.

The immediate threat as I understand it from the Labour party's recent comments is to hunting on Ministry of Defence land. That would especially affect my constituency, because Salisbury plain is slightly to the south of it. We have some experience of such a ban there as, five years ago, hunting across the impact area was banned for safety reasons. After only a few years, farmers petitioned the MOD once again to allow hunting on the impact area because their land and poultry were suffering such appalling depredations. That case study would be repeated across the United Kingdom in the event of fox hunting being banned.

My particular concern with today's debate is that the political correctness of extending the stringent Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, which my right hon. and learned Friend the former Home Secretary brought in last year, will stretch ultimately to field sports. Before commenting on the Bill, I should declare an interest.

I was brought up in Dunblane, my father was the minister of Dunblane cathedral and my mother was one of the doctors who took part in the counselling in the aftermath of the tragedy. More than perhaps many hon. Members, I was therefore deeply, deeply affected by the tragedy last year. Indeed, my younger brother attended Dunblane primary school.

Despite the fact that I lived in a field sports area all last year, I went to some length to justify the 1997 Act. I came under considerable pressure from the shooting lobby in North Wiltshire, which felt that I was not doing the right thing. I am conscious that, in opposing the Government's Bill, I shall come under equal pressure from my friends and relations who still live in the town of Dunblane. I therefore oppose the Bill intentionally and thoughtfully, while feeling deeply about the issue of Dunblane, simply because I believe that it will go no way at all towards preventing another such incident. I have a horrible feeling that the Bill has a taint of self-righteousness about it, of trying to appear to put something right rather than putting it right.

We made sure during the passage of the previous Government's Bill last year that Dunblane could never again occur. Today's Bill does not achieve that. It merely attempts to demonstrate to the public that the Labour party is as concerned now about the aftermath of Dunblane as we were last year. For that reason I find the Bill—speaking as a Dunblane boy—somewhat distasteful.

As I said, I came under huge pressure from the gun lobby. I bore that pressure and spoke up strongly in favour of the Bill of my right hon. and learned Friend the former Home Secretary. I know that I shall come under some pressure from my friends and relations in Dunblane as a result of making my comments, but I feel terribly strongly about the right of shooters to take part in Olympic sports, which the Bill would ban. I also feel strongly for people who work in gun factories—many of whom are represented by Labour Members—and who would be fundamentally affected by the Bill. It is for that reason that I have overcome my natural emotional inclination to support the Bill, and I very much hope that Labour Members will join me in the No Lobby.

6.45 pm

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): It is an honour to make my maiden speech, especially in this important debate. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on doing likewise. He made an extremely valuable contribution to the debate.

I represent the new constituency of Brigg and Goole. I can genuinely say that it is new, because when the boundary commissioners decided that Humberside should change from nine constituencies to 10, the nine sitting hon. Members all seemed to work out for themselves the boundaries that they wanted and Brigg and Goole was what was left at the end of that process.

I have three predecessors—two of whom are still hon. Members—who represented parts of what we now call Brigg and Goole. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr. Davis), who was present until quite recently, did so for 10 years. Indeed, I believe that this week—perhaps even today—is his 10th anniversary of entering the House. In those 10 years, he has had by any standards an upwardly mobile career, even though it was as a Conservative Member. I am sure that he hopes that that will continue.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who has just entered the Chamber, represented the Brigg and Goole area when it used to be known as Glanford and Scunthorpe. He has already been mentioned by the shadow Home Secretary, who referred to an article that he had written in the *Shooting Times*. I used to work in my hon. Friend's office and was worried for a second about whether I had had anything to do with the article. When the shadow Home Secretary said where the article was published, I knew: "Not me, guv."

The third person who used to represent what we now call Brigg and Goole is the former Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes, Michael Brown. Most of his constituency went into that of Cleethorpes; my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) paid a warm tribute to him in her maiden speech last week. I certainly want to be associated with all those comments.

I fought Michael Brown in the 1992 general election. I found him an extremely able opponent and a principled politician. My respect for him grew enormously during that campaign. Following that, in my days as leader of the local authority in North Lincolnshire, I found him an extremely helpful local Member of Parliament in arranging visits to Ministers and the like. He certainly always did what he thought was in the best interests of the people of Brigg and Cleethorpes, and whatever he chooses to do with life outside Parliament, I for one wish him well. I am sure that other hon. Members would wish to associate themselves with that remark.

My constituency stretches from Goole at its most northern tip all the way down to where Lincolnshire borders with Nottinghamshire. Goole and the surrounding

[Mr. Ian Cawsey]

villages are now in the East Riding of Yorkshire, thanks to the previous Government's local government reorganisation. Of course, that has done nothing to satisfy the locals, who argue passionately that they are really from the West Riding of Yorkshire. As that was not in line with the Government's proposition, they did not get that change. The rest of the constituency lies in north Lincolnshire, leaving me the unenviable task of trying to achieve what the people say Humberside county never achieved: getting the people of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire to live together in one entity.

The port town of Goole and its people are extremely proud. Despite being the largest conurbation by some measure in my constituency, it has a friendly community spirit. I have enjoyed immensely the work that I have done there since I was first selected as candidate for the area. The people have been through difficult times in the recession, but I am glad to say that the town has been like a phoenix rising from the ashes. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that my first official engagement as the Member of Parliament was to open the new steel terminal that has been built by Associated British Ports at the port in Goole. I trust that that is a hopeful sign of things to come.

As I have the ear of the House, I should like to plead for a bypass, which Goole lacks. The old port, known as Old Goole, is landlocked when all the bridges are open, which is a great inconvenience to the local people. A bypass has been built for all but that part of my constituency. Although the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions is not present, I hope that I can get a copy of *Hansard* to him, so that he understands that need. I am sure that he already does.

South of Goole is the Isle of Axholme, which mainly consists of flat farming country. In fact, it is reclaimed land and I pay tribute to the many internal drainage boards, whose excellent work ensures that the area remains first-class agricultural land.

All hon. Members claim that they represent a beautiful part of the world, but I truly do represent such an area. It includes the town of Epworth, which is perhaps most famous for being the home of John and Charles Wesley. It was the birthplace of the Methodist faith. The Wesley steps are still in the town centre and the Methodist faith remains extremely strong and important in the area. I am a Methodist and although I do not think that that is why I was elected, I do not think that it hurt either.

East from the Isle of Axholme, one crosses the River Trent to the villages and towns that are north of Scunthorpe and lead up to the Humber. As one might expect, there are many wharves around the Humber, including Flixborough, which, tragically, is probably best known to many hon. Members as the place where the largest peacetime explosion occurred, when the nitro-chemical works blew up on 1 June 1974. That killed 28 local people and injured 36. It is some indication of the strength of that explosion that it destroyed or severely damaged nearly 2,000 houses and 167 local shops. Even today in the village one can see the driveways to houses that were literally blown away by the blast. It remains a sobering reminder of the need for vigilant health and safety work in modern industry.

The Member of Parliament at the time of the explosion was the former Member for Brigg and Scunthorpe, John Ellis. Some hon. Members may recall that he served a Bristol constituency in the 1960s and Brigg and Scunthorpe in the 1970s, when he was a Whip in the previous Labour Government. Ironically, he is now my neighbour, which is how I got all those figures about Flixborough.

My constituency takes in many picturesque northern Lincolnshire villages before it finally finishes at Brigg, which is a lovely market town. It is home to a large part of North Lincolnshire council. It was particularly famous last year when Brigg Town football club won the FA vase when it beat Clitheroe 3-0 at Wembley. Those of us who were there will never forget that occasion. It is a beautiful part of the world, which I am privileged to serve.

I particularly wanted to contribute to the debate because I believe in banning handguns. That is not a recent view. In my former life, I was the chairman of Humberside police authority for several years and that experience made me believe that such legislation is necessary. I have had the great honour to visit other countries to look at their police forces and I have also hosted visits from overseas officers. They all say that the one item of our legislation that they would like to introduce, and which we should cherish and strengthen, is the control of handguns. Anyone who has visited America, and I am sure many hon. Members have done so, will understand why police officers believe that.

As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, this is an all-or-nothing matter. The previous 1997 Act was illogical because it banned some but not all handguns. I have spoken to members of my local police force—I am sure that other hon. Members have spoken to their respective forces—and they support their national associations. They would welcome the proposed ban. The shadow Home Secretary said that he was not sure whether the Association of Chief Police Officers was in favour of the ban, but I am sure that even he would accept that if the Police Federation and the Superintendents Association support it, that must account for between 98 and 99 per cent. of all police officers. One should note that the one rank left is that least likely to be out on patrol.

It is simpler for the police to enforce the law if they know that all handguns are illegal. That avoids arguments about the legal status of one calibre weapon as opposed to another. If the law is to be effective, it must be enforceable.

Some firearms will remain legal—for example, shotguns and rifles—but we could learn about improving the safety of those weapons by studying what has happened in Australia. Following the mass shootings at Port Arthur in Tasmania, the authorities have tightened the gun registration procedures. Apart from banning many firearms, the Australian authorities have introduced several levels of registration. The most powerful weapons may be licensed only after rigorous examination of their use and in exceptional circumstances. In fact, they can be kept only for employment purposes. Those different levels of registration cover air rifles and airguns, but they are exempt from registration in this country.

I have spoken to members of the Australian police and I know that they believe that the new ban has made a great improvement to public safety. Hon. Members might

also be interested to know that the Australians, too, have had to decide how compensation should be paid. In the absence of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I can tell the House that that was achieved through a one-off tax. It was widely supported by the public, who wanted to see such weapons taken off the streets.

Firearms benefit from technological changes. Anyone who has any knowledge of firearms manufacture will know that, following the 1997 Act, manufacturers studied how to manufacture handguns that effectively were still the same as those that the previous Government wanted to ban. They worked on new products that were designed to be one thing but to look like another. Never underestimate the ingenuity of those manufacturers.

The Firearms Consultative Committee was set up under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988, which was passed after the Hungerford disaster. That committee is in urgent need of reform. It could act as an effective monitor, but not given its current membership. The law states that the membership should be

"drawn from those who appear to the Home Secretary to have knowledge and experience of either the possession, use (in particular for sport or competition) or keeping of, or transaction in firearms; or weapon technology; or the administration or enforcement of the provisions of the Firearms Act."

That is a wonderful bit of Sir Humphrey Appleby. It has led to an unbalanced committee. Although it has undertaken some good work, for which I pay it tribute, it is more interested in protecting shooters' rights rather than in protecting the public. In the past, local authorities had just two members on the committee, but the former Home Secretary had them replaced by those from the shooting fraternity. One man, Councillor John Mellor, was a victim of that decision. I pay tribute to him for the work that he did on that committee, to communicate to it the public's concern about firearms. That is not a political point, because Councillor Mellor is a Conservative member of Wolverhampton council. If my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary decides to retain that committee, I hope that the reinstatement of Councillor Mellor and others might be considered.

The committee has produced seven reports, which I have read. We have heard a lot today about how seriously shooting clubs and pistol associations take the matter of handgun control and legislation relating to it. If so, I am bound to say that that represents a bit of conversion. After all, in 1993, the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and the National Pistol Association made a submission to the committee in favour of relaxing handgun legislation. One should remember that the legislation in question was not the Bill that we are discussing now nor the 1997 Act, but the 1988 Act. They argued in favour of relaxing handgun legislation to encourage tourism. They stated:

"hunting handguns are widely used by shooters in North America and a less restrictive approach might encourage more of them to cross the Atlantic for shooting holidays."

I do not believe that that is a sensible approach to the use of handguns and I am yet to be convinced that those organisations have the public interest at heart.

As well as—I am pleased to say—rejecting that submission, the consultative committee made 160 recommendations in seven reports to the former Government to improve firearms safety, but those recommendations were largely ignored. In its 1994 report to the House, the committee expressed profound disappointment that parliamentary time had not been found for legislation. That disappointment was reaffirmed in its report to the House in 1995. On 12 February 1996, one month and one day before Dunblane, Lord Marlesford asked Baroness Blatch, then a Home Office Minister, what action was being taken on the consultative committee's recommendations. She replied that primary legislation was needed, but was unable to say when that might happen. The tragedy at Dunblane changed all that.

We have had seven reports, 160 recommendations and eight years of inactivity, followed by an Act that is neither one thing nor the other. It was not, as the shadow Home Secretary said, that the previous Government wanted to tighten firearms control; they wanted to do as little as they thought they could get away with in the face of the public outrage following Dunblane. Having considered the matter carefully, particularly in my former police authority role, I believe that it is time for the House to stop dithering and to stop acting, as the previous Government did, in a half-hearted way. It is time to ban handguns and I urge the House to support the Bill.

7.1 pm

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey): I congratulate the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on his maiden speech. He said that he was chairman of his police authority and I congratulate him on his many years' service in that role. He will know that, often, what counts is not how good the gun laws are, but how well they are enforced—the Dunblane disaster was an example of that. The hon. Gentleman also applauded the parliamentary record of his next door neighbour, Mr. John Ellis, who was previously the hon. Member for Bristol, North-West, a constituency which I have also had the honour to represent.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole and I share one further similarity: both our maiden speeches contained references to Mr. John Wesley. He may have been born in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but it was in Bristol that he did most of his work and the Methodism movement was launched.

I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on his maiden speech. He is almost one of my neighbours. He referred to the distinguished record of one his predecessors, Viscount Eccles. I well recall one of the early debates that we had in my locality on the movement of the county boundary. I do not think that there is anyone in the House who has not suffered from constituency boundary changes in one way or another.

That local debate was about whether the county boundary between Wiltshire and Hampshire should be moved. There was a turnout of 200 people at the meeting which, for a rural area, was considerable. Points were put with tremendous passion and the argument went to and fro. Viscount Eccles stayed fairly silent until the end of the debate, when the arguments seemed to be fairly well balanced and there was obviously going to be a division. At that point he got up and said, "To my mind, it is quite simple. Do you want to stay a Wiltshire moonraker or become a Hampshire hog?" The county boundary stayed precisely where it is and will no doubt remain so for as long as Viscount Eccles is living. He is well, robust and still a local.

[Mr. Michael Colvin]

I should also like to refer to the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). He may have lost Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman as a Member of Parliament, but I have won her as a constituent. I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that she is not going to have a peaceful and quiet retirement—someone like her could not retire peacefully.

Dame Elaine is married to my local Member of the European Parliament. Hon. Members who remember her efforts in this House will never have participated in a debate when she has not intervened in some way or another if present, and her interventions have always been audible. It is significant to see her at a meeting with her husband. When he is in authority or when she is attending one of my local meetings where, as a local Member of Parliament, I command a certain amount of respect, the good Dame is silent. The only times in my life when I have seen her silent are when she has been supporting me as a Member of Parliament or her husband as a local Member of the European Parliament.

On behalf of Dame Elaine and Mr. Keith Mans, I thank the hon. Gentleman for the good messages that he has sent them. We were sorry to lose Keith because his contributions in the House, both in defence debates and in any debates involving civil aviation or aerospace, were considerable. He had immense knowledge of the subjects. He was once one of my constituents when I represented a constituency containing part of the New Forest. I shall pass the hon. Gentleman's messages on to Mr. Mans.

Listening to the speeches, I have a slight sense of déjà vu. During debates on what became the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, there was hardly a single Back-Bench speech in support of the proposals, yet the Bill was passed. Until we heard the speech of the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole I do not think that we had heard any real support for what is being proposed today.

I oppose Second Reading. I support the reasoned amendment tabled in the name of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Home Secretary. Another reasoned amendment on the Order Paper was not selected; it is in my name and that of, among others, my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). Some 16 hon. Members signed that reasoned amendment, which says broadly the same thing as that tabled in the name of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. I am keen to add my support to the amendments tabled by the hon. Members for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) and for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell).

I should like to ask the Minister a couple of questions relating to the parliamentary procedures for dealing with the Bill. First, why has the Home Secretary decided to commit the Bill to a Standing Committee of the whole House? When do the Government foresee the Committee stage taking place? There has been some talk of 19 June—it would assist us, particularly in view of the large number of amendments that are likely to be tabled, to have some idea of the date. The alternative procedure proposed by the hon. Member for Stockton, North—a Special Standing Committee to hear evidence from expert witnesses—is preferable. Given the Bill's nature—admittedly, it is a narrow Bill—there is surely a compelling case for subjecting it to expert, specialised and detailed scrutiny before we consider amendments.

The House may be aware that shooting is the fastest-growing participation sport in this country. Some 2 million people shoot using pistol, rifle or shotgun and it is the second largest sport after fishing. That said, there is a remarkable degree of ignorance about involvement in those sports. That is why I think that the Select Committee procedure could well be used to advantage in this case.

The present law, which was amended by the Conservative Government, is now the toughest in the world and that is tough enough in my view—in fact, I think it went rather too far. The 1997 Act banned all high-calibre handguns above .22 rimfire and also removed handguns from general circulation. It banned all handguns from the home, which is certainly a good thing; it required that .22 handguns should be kept and used in licensed gun clubs under the strictest security; and it made it a criminal offence to take a .22 handgun out of a licensed club without a police permit. It also tightened the procedure for issuing firearms certificates and gave the police stronger powers to revoke certificates. That was a welcome measure, because, had those powers existed at the time of Dunblane, the local police authority could have revoked Mr. Thomas Hamilton's licence, thereby saving the lives of many children and their teacher.

Nevertheless, I believe that the 1997 Act went too far. The dismantling recommendations that were proposed in amendments were workable and would have done nothing to endanger the general public. In fact, refusing to accept those dismantling arrangements did nothing further to safeguard the public. When enacted, the 1997 legislation displayed a rather regrettable and unholy alliance between Front Benchers on both sides. It was an example of an knee-jerk reaction to a national tragedy—it was understandable, but such reactions sometimes make bad law. Having established the Cullen inquiry, the Government should have accepted its conclusions and enacted measures accordingly.

The Bill extends the ban to .22 handguns and I remind the House that, during the Committee stage of what became the 1997 Act, my then hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, proposed an amendment to that effect so that all handguns would be banned. That amendment was narrowly defeated by 25 votes. I have not checked the record, but I believe that, in that Division, several Conservative Members and possibly some Opposition Members voted in favour of the amendment, so it is not true to say that the Whips stopped people voting according to their beliefs, although they may have tried to exert their usual influence. None the less, I still believe that the 1997 Act represented a disgraceful collusion between Front Benchers against Back Benchers who were opposed to the Conservative Government's proposals. On that occasion, we Back Benchers were defending the rights of 57,000 law-abiding citizens who were made scapegoats for the criminal activities of others.

It is important to note the Labour party's evidence to the Cullen inquiry in May 1996, which was presented by the current Secretary of State for Defence and the Home Secretary. Page 5, paragraph 17 of that evidence states:

"we recommended that handguns above .22 inch calibre should certainly be prohibited. We also believe that the strong case for restricting handguns of .22 calibre and below to those which need to be reloaded after each shot should carefully be examined by the Inquiry."

They did not, therefore, recommend a .22 ban, but said instead that single-shot .22 pistols should be accepted. Why have the Labour Government changed their views?

As I said earlier, this is a somewhat narrow Bill, but I want to know whether it is the thin end of the wedge. Labour also made recommendations to Cullen on rifles. Page 5, paragraph 20 states:

"we think there should also be a general prohibition on rifles above .22 inch calibre."

This evening, I want a specific assurance from the Minister that there are no other Bills in draft to extend the ban or to bring air rifles and shotguns within section 1 certification. It is important that the House be told.

The Bill aims to prohibit the general ownership, possession or use of all handguns by civilians and seeks to achieve that by including small-calibre pistols in the list of weapons that are prohibited under section 5 of the Firearms Act 1968, unless authorised by the Home Secretary. In his report, Lord Cullen said:

"I do not consider that the banning of handguns for target shooting or the banning of shooting clubs would be justified."

What are the Government's reasons for disregarding that recommendation?

My next point relates to the important matter that is the subject of the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Stockton, North—competition shooting. I should apologise for the fact that I was not present in the Chamber for some of his speech this evening, but what I heard was pretty good stuff and I am sure that the rest was too.

The shooting of .22 pistols has a legitimate place in the traditions of Olympic competition and it is a sport enjoyed by thousands of law-abiding citizens. We see in the Bill a fundamental contradiction in the Labour party's thinking, because the Labour manifesto says:

"A Labour Government will take the lead in extending opportunities for participation in sports; and in identifying sporting excellence and supporting it."

I, too, support that part of the manifesto. It continues:

"A Labour Government will also work to bring the Olympics and other major international sporting events to Britain."

Again, I am in agreement—it is extraordinary how much we can agree across the Floor of the House. The contradiction is that, on the one hand, the Labour party claims to support our great sporting traditions, yet, on the other, the Labour Government have now proposed policies that would effectively destroy some of those traditions.

The Home Secretary said that most people would support a total ban. I do not think that he is right. As hon. Members know and as new Members will discover, a Member of Parliament's postbag is a useful litmus test of public opinion and those of us who were in the House during debates on the 1997 Act will know that letters supporting the Conservative Government's proposals outnumbered those expressing the view that the proposals were a diabolical infringement of individual liberties by a ratio of about 10 to one. I will take an intervention from anyone who wishes to correct me or to agree with me on that point.

Mr. Frank Cook: I am grateful for the hardly covered invitation to intervene. I have a file drawer which, without separators or dividers, is full of the correspondence relating to firearms legislation that I have received since Dunblane. There must be several thousand letters, none of which is a duplicate or cyclostyle, but only three of those letters take issue with my views on firearms legislation. I have a constituency covering 68,000 people, yet only three letters from constituents of mine tell me I am wrong. All the rest agree with me or plead for my support and further participation in opposing the legislation. That is the sort of ratio I can report to the House.

Mr. Colvin: That proves that the hon. Gentleman is a better advocate in presenting his case than I am in presenting mine this evening. People are obviously persuaded by his oratorical skills. The balance of public opinion—those people who are prepared to write to a Member of Parliament—is very much against the proposals in the Bill.

It appears that the Government have forgotten that Britain is to host the Commonwealth games in 2002. We are committed to hosting .22 pistol events in those games. Indeed, Manchester finally won its bid for the games because of that assurance. The Home Secretary's applause for that victory was somewhat cynical. Shooting is the third most popular sport in the games and most nations compete in it. The right hon. Gentleman reminded us that it covers 174 events in all.

Mr. Frank Cook: Within the Commonwealth games, some nations participate only in shooting events. Some nations are so small that they do not even have a running track or a football pitch. But they can and do participate in shooting, and they do so with great joy. They do not win many medals, but is the only way in which they can participate in the games. That is why the Commonwealth Games Association is so insistent that shooting be included.

Mr. Colvin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making the point that I was about to make. I need not bother to make it now.

Mr. Michael: I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his suggestion that there was anything cynical in what my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said. He cleared away any doubt about the position of shooting in the Commonwealth games—or, indeed, the Olympic games in the future. I urge the hon. Gentleman not to bolster a weak case by talking down the impending success of the Commonwealth games in Manchester.

Mr. Colvin: I was interested to hear what the hon. Gentleman had to say. However, on the one hand the Home Secretary was applauding the fact that the games would be in Manchester and that the United Kingdom was committed to holding .22 pistol events, but on the other he was telling British pistol shooters, "Bad luck chums, you can't participate."

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend was recognising reality; he was being honest and up front with the House. He made it quite clear that the safety of the public outweighs the continuation of the sport. He was perfectly honest about that. He then said, for precisely the reasons mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), that the law allowed him to make an exception so as to place no obstacle in the way of the

[Mr. Michael]

Commonwealth games—or, on a future occasion, the Olympic games—taking place in this country with participation in the sport.

Mr. Colvin: The hon. Gentleman and I differ on this—

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Mr. Colvin: No, I am not wrong and I will not withdraw my remarks. It is extraordinary that visiting teams will be able to take part in a sport in which this country happens to excel, while our sports men will not be able to participate.

I wonder what sort of role the police will have. A marksman—a pistol shooter—is somewhat wedded to his weapon. I cannot imagine what it will be like when visiting teams come to this country and have to leave their weapons in an armoury and be escorted everywhere by the police to ensure that they comply with the proposed law.

I ask the Minister to make a note of what I am saying. Whereas with the existing Act, introduced by the Conservative Government, there was not any risk of contravention of the European convention on human rights, what is proposed by the Labour Government may run foul of the convention. The Minister may find himself, on behalf of the Government, having to defend the Government's position in the European courts. I am no great fan of those courts, but that is where the hon. Gentleman may find himself.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North–East Hertfordshire): My hon. Friend said that we are dealing with an internationally recognised sport. Does he think that this House could gain any wisdom from the fact that almost every other country in the world recognises .22 shooting as a legitimate sport and allows people to practise it?

Mr. Colvin: There are plenty of lessons to be learned. When drawing international comparisons, we should acknowledge the fact that this country already has the toughest firearms legislation of any country in the world. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the shadow Home Secretary, looks as though he wants to spring to his feet.

Mr. Howard *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Colvin: No, my right hon. and learned Friend is just listening attentively.

Has the Minister seriously considered the impact of the Bill's proposals on disabled people? What consultations have there been with the British Paraplegic Shooting Association, which has trained its members exceptionally hard for the Paralympics? Why should disabled shooters be penalised by the Government's proposals? That matter was raised earlier by the right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith).

The Bill does not deserve the support of the House. It contains proposals that quite unnecessarily attack the liberty of individuals, damage vital British sporting traditions and add injury to the already draconian measure introduced in the last Parliament. In the Government's attempt to look tough, they have once again stepped over the mark. I urge all hon. Members to support the amendment.

7.26 pm

Angela Smith (Basildon): I take great pride in making my maiden speech as the Member for Basildon, which now includes east Thurrock. Basildon has a special place in the hearts of many Labour Members and supporters throughout the country. For a number of years, it has been regarded as a weathervane seat and the home of Essex man and Essex woman. No one could have envisaged that Romford or Hove would take over its weathervane title. It is a mantle which I am happy to pass on.

The boundaries of my seat have changed many times over the years. The new constituency includes Basildon, parts of Laindon and Langdon Hills and the new and welcome addition of east Thurrock, including Corringham and Fobbing, Stanford-le-Hope and Orsett. Those who think of it as merely an urban seat should think again. It has a large country park, numerous sites of special scientific interest, a rich and varied flora—including wetland species—and a number of farms.

The new town, which is held by many in great affection, provided for me and my family, and many like us, a new home, new jobs, a new community and a fresh start. Many Members of Parliament who have represented parts of my constituency have gone on to represent other constituencies, including Lord Braine, Sir Edward Gardner, the hon. Member for Boston and Skegness (Sir R. Body) and, most recently, the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), who will always be remembered for the slogan, "I love Basildon".

The most recent Labour Member of Parliament was Eric Moonman, from 1966 to 1970 and from 1974 to 1979. Eric has retained his links with the community and he is recognised and remembered affectionately by many former constituents. All my predecessors, including a number whom I do not have time to mention this evening, have enjoyed the reputation of being hard-working, committed constituency Members of Parliament. It is a reputation that I, too, intend to earn.

Sadly, in 1984, the maiden speech of my predecessor, now the hon. Member for Southend, West, included strong attacks on Basildon council. As hon. Members will come to realise, my style is very different. The old politics of confrontation and attack must go and be replaced with partnerships and co-operation. I have three local authorities—Thurrock unitary, Essex county and Basildon district—and I shall work with them for the benefit of my constituents. They may make mistakes and I am sure that at times we shall disagree, but I promise them that my energies will be directed at working with, not against, them.

There are many misconceptions about my constituency. Basildon is a place that I have always called home and, like other Basildonians, I have been hurt and offended by some descriptions of my area. It may surprise some that a Labour Member would stand in this House and praise *The Sun* and *The Daily Telegraph* and criticise *The Guardian*, but we have had a far fairer hearing from the first two newspapers and are tired of some of the snide comments that we read about ourselves in other papers. It may come as no surprise that *The Sun* has the largest readership in my constituency, while *The Guardian* has the lowest. We ask only for fairness from all who consider us.

Sometimes, I do not even recognise descriptions of my constituency. I can now set the record straight. The Basildon and east Thurrock area is a developing one with a lively, ambitious and energetic population. Both Basildon and Thurrock have a thriving voluntary sector—local people giving freely of their time and energy for the benefit of others. Our schools make an enormous contribution to the community and will work in partnership with the Government to raise standards by providing better opportunities for all our young people.

A new development is the Basildon art and design initiative, led by local artist Tony Beckwith, who has developed a new art gallery, and works with schools and young people to encourage an interest in the arts and develop local talent. A local sculptor, Dave Chappel, has donated to the town a magnificent wooden "Basildon man" sculpture, which he made from a fallen tree. Tina Burrett from St. Cleres school was national young politician of the year for the 300 group in 1996. Science teacher, Karen Tann, from Nicholas school gained a Salters award for science and came second in the country. Many more have excelled in the fields of science and sport, including our excellent American football team.

My first official engagement as Member of Parliament was to attend the Basildon business awards and I shall attend Thurrock's business awards next week with my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). The business community and the work force in both our constituencies are determined to play their part in regenerating the local environment and economy. I pay tribute to them for what they are doing.

Last Sunday, I met trade unionists from Belarus, hosted by Fiat unions and management. They are leading the way in developing links with workers in other countries, which is something from which we can all learn. I am proud to represent Basildon and shall do my best to ensure that a fairer and more balanced image of my constituency is presented in future.

I have received many representations on the handgun issue. I have had letters and telephone calls from people who supported the actions of the last Government in banning some handguns but felt that it did not go far enough. When a petition was drawn up in the constituency, that was the only occasion I have known people to queue for 20 minutes, to declare their interest and say how they felt about handguns.

The most recent figures issued in 1996 show that there are more than 40,000 handguns, although fewer than 5 per cent. of those are single shotguns. A major concern is the use of handguns in crime. Handguns, particularly .22s, are small and easily concealable. In 1985, 1,200 incidents involved handguns. By 1995, however, that figure had more than doubled, although it reached a peak a couple of years earlier. In 1995, more than 3,000 criminal offences were committed using handguns. There were 150 cases of violence against the person, 230 cases of attempted murder and 39 homicide cases. Those are alarming statistics. Unfortunately, the Home Office has no breakdown of the separation of higher-calibre handguns and .22s, but those crimes could equally have been committed with .22s and there is no evidence to suggest that they will not continue to be committed if handguns remain in circulation. International comparisons bare that out.

Although many handgun owners and users are responsible and are as appalled as the rest of us at the use of handguns in crime, we cannot put their concerns and interests above genuine public safety concerns and fears. The public have made their views known on this issue. Neither they nor we are personally attacking handgun owners, but the case has yet to be made for keeping rather than banning handguns.

No one can say that the Bill alone will dramatically reduce crime or that a madman will not get hold of a gun. That is not in our power. We can, however, do everything possible to make it less likely. For the people of Basildon and east Thurrock and of Britain as a whole, I shall support the motion before us.

7.37 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): First, I compliment the hon. Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) on her excellent maiden speech. I am sure that the former hon. Members for Basildon will be pleased with her kind remarks about them.

I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on his earlier maiden speech. Unfortunately, I could not hear it all because I had to leave the Chamber to attend a Committee, but I know from colleagues that it was excellent and I wish to be associated with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) in complimenting my hon. Friend.

I wish to concentrate on shooting as a sport and issues to do with disabled sportsmen and women. First, however, in this of all debates, I should draw attention to the work done over many years by my distinguished former colleague, Sir Cranley Onslow. I take this opportunity also to mention my two other predecessors for my new constituency, Sir Michael Grylls and Sir David Howell. Although this is far from my maiden speech, it is the first substantive speech that I have made on a Second Reading debate in this Parliament as the first Member of Parliament for the new constituency of Surrey Heath and it would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the former Members for the three constituencies that make up the new seat—parts of Guildford, parts of Woking and North-West Surrey. Were those hon. Members still in the House, I am sure that they would all wish to speak on the same side as me in this debate. They were all distinguished Members who represented their constituencies ably over many years. Sir Michael Grylls was known for his work in supporting small businesses over many years and Sir Cranley Onslow was known, especially recently, for his work on this issue. In what is sure to be a happy retirement for him and Lady Onslow, I am sure that he will continue to take a strong interest in this issue above all others.

My concern is guided by the fact that Bisley is in my new constituency. The National Rifle Association's ranges are just over the constituency boundary in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins). Nevertheless, many people who chose to live in Bisley because of their interest and involvement in shooting are my constituents.

I have always been interested in sport. In the previous Parliament, I was, for some years, chairman of the Conservative Back-Bench sports committee and, before that, its secretary. I also had the honour to serve as

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

parliamentary private secretary in the Department of National Heritage, dealing with, among other matters, sport. In those capacities, I have been heavily involved in working with disabled sports people. I was involved in fund raising for the last two Paralympics for disabled fencing competitors, who competed with great success and won medals. I was involved with disabled athletes competing in wheelchair athletics and wheelchair racing.

As I mentioned in a brief intervention on the speech of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), I have received a detailed letter on the Bill from the British Paraplegic Shooting Association. It is from the chairman, Mr. Nicholls, who has the honour of holding the British Empire Medal. He points out that all newly disabled people go to Stoke Mandeville sports stadium for the disabled with a view to taking part in as many and whatever sports they feel comfortable with. They arrive at the event of their choice—track, archery, swimming or shooting—by a process of elimination over a period of years. They are presented with shooting as a means of rehabilitation to help with balance and confidence, primarily in the use of a wheelchair and sport. That provides them with a better quality of life and respect for themselves as disabled people in an able-bodied world.

As the sport is closely followed by many disabled people at grass roots level, it follows that a wide range of disabled people are enthusiastic shooters, whether or not they ever reach the high standards required for the Paralympics. Those who reach the Paralympic standard train extremely hard—at least four times per week, and every day in the run-up to the Paralympics. Shooting is their sport.

Following the Paralympics in Atlanta in 1996, the Paralympic committee has taken out two of the air weapons events and increased the number of live ammunition events, because the competition in air weapons had reached such a high standard and more competitive participation was needed. The current situation is that disabled competitors use .22 calibre pistols in six events in the Paralympics, three for men and three for women competitors: sport pistol, free pistol and standard pistol.

Mr. Nicholls has drawn my attention to the fact that many disabled shooters are women with children of their own. The deepest sympathy of disabled shooters therefore goes out to the parents of the children tragically killed by Thomas Hamilton at Dunblane. Should the disabled shooters be penalised because of the maniac who was already known to the police for alleged child abuse and misuse of firearms?

At the time of the debates in the previous Parliament, when I spoke twice to try to persuade the then Government to modify their view, I felt strongly and I still feel that a person who should have had his firearms certificate revoked before the event had a chance to take place, if the police had used the then existing law properly, should not cause the House to pass draconian legislation that will interfere hugely in the lives of so many people who simply wish to pursue a previously lawful sport.

Shooting for the disabled was initiated in this country and is now recognised world wide. It would be ironic if Great Britain were the only country to be eliminated from international competitions by this legislation. The sport of disabled shooting has a proud history in the UK. Mr. Nicholls pointed out to me that the UK can boast the only shooter in the world who has won three gold medals in three consecutive Paralympics. At the Paralympics in Atlanta in 1996, UK disabled shooters won gold and silver medals and set a new Paralympic record. At the European championships in 1995, disabled shooters won one gold, two silver and one bronze medal. In the world Paralympic games in 1994, Great Britain won two gold, two silver and two bronze medals.

The loss to disabled shooters will be extensive, as they will no longer be able to socialise and travel the world to compete in their sport. It will take their quality of life back, perhaps to the Victorian era when disabled people were often shut away from the eyes of the world. No hon. Member would want to encourage that.

The proposed legislation will have huge effects on disabled people, as I hope I have made clear. There are yet further reasons for opposing it, as I do. I am particularly sorry that the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey, among others, was not selected for debate.

Pistol shooting is one of the few sports in which everyone competes on equal terms—young, old, male, female, able bodied and disabled are all valued in the sport. It offers positive incentives for disabled people, as I mentioned. It is crucial that Labour Members, many of whom have a proud record of work for the disabled, as I am well aware, should take the concerns of disabled shooters carefully into account.

The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) who spoke powerfully earlier in the debate—albeit from the other side of the House, but on the same side of the argument as I am speaking—stressed the genuine concern felt by many of us on both sides of the House who take an interest in sport about the threat to the Commonwealth games in Manchester. Because of my strong involvement in sport in the north-west at the time, I was actively involved in supporting Manchester's bid to host the Commonwealth games, and I was delighted when it won. The UK is committed to hosting the .22 pistol events in the games. That commitment, which was given by the previous Government, played a big part in the success of the Manchester bid.

It must be remembered that when the original bid was lodged, the organisers of the Manchester bid had omitted shooting events. The attempt to exclude shooting was fiercely opposed by other nations. Fifty of the 63 countries involved in the Commonwealth games made it known that they would vote for the inclusion of shooting, for reasons such as those mentioned by the hon. Member for Stockton, North. That is not surprising, as shooting is the third most popular sport in the games, and most Commonwealth countries compete in it. If the Bill became an Act, it might jeopardise Manchester's obligation and its opportunity to host the games. It would be wrong for the Bill to be enacted if it had that effect.

As a sporting spectacle, the pistol shooting events would be reduced to a farce, especially if the UK competitors were the only ones from any Commonwealth country who were unable to compete, as the Home Secretary made clear. The law as it stands will require competitors to have a section 5 licence to carry their guns in the country—a licence with requirements so stringent as not to be practicable.

There are huge concerns about the issues relating to sport, but I shall close by raising a concern mentioned by one of my constituents in correspondence with my former colleague, the former Member for North-West Surrey, Sir Michael Grylls, which was copied to me. The constituent wrote:

"In 1979 our son aged 19 months died by drowning in a neighbour's unfenced swimming pool. All of our family can therefore relate to the terrible grieving that the Dunblane parents are suffering. However, we did not try to get our revenge on society by campaigning to have all private swimming pools filled in, and I am sure that such a campaign would not receive any political support as there would be no votes in it."

The constituent was writing to my predecessor, expressing the view that the law proposed by the then Government would destroy a legitimate sport and penalise law-abiding people who have committed no crime. He made a point that I found particularly powerful in his personal circumstances. He asked:

"What has happened to British justice when you are supposed to be innocent until proved guilty if this sort of legislation can go through?"

He was referring to the previous Government's proposals. I am sure that he would feel even more strongly about what the new Government are proposing by way of a total ban.

I received letters from people elsewhere in the country who had lost sons and daughters in road accidents. As a young lawyer, I was brought up to believe that hard cases make bad law. There are no proposals from the present Government, as I understand it, to ban the use of motor cars simply because people sometimes steal cars and use them in a way that leads to the death of young children.

Mr. Colvin: The noble Lord Monson recently asked a parliamentary question about the number of deaths of children in road accidents. The last year for which figures are available is 1994; I forget the precise figure, but it was more than 400.

Mr. Hawkins: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his helpful intervention, which reinforces my point.

I draw the attention of the hon. Member for Basildon, who made her excellent maiden speech before I spoke, and some of her hon. Friends, to some further interesting statistics that were presented in an article in the *Police Review* last autumn. The comparison of rates of armed crime and firearms ownership over the past 40 years reinforces the point made by my hon. Friend.

In the whole of 1954, there were only four armed robberies in London in which firearms were used. Between April 1994 and April 1995, there were 1,338 recorded crimes of a similar type in the Metropolitan area—nearly four a day. However, during the same period, from 1954 to 1994, the number of firearms certificate holders in London dropped dramatically. It was estimated in the article that there were roughly half as many certificate holders in London now as there were in the 1950s. There is no simple relationship between conventional armed crime and the lawful possession of firearms.

There is even more striking support for the view that lawfully owned firearms and armed crime are effectively unrelated. That comes from a study of firearms used in armed robberies in the Metropolitan area, which was conducted by Metropolitan Detective Inspector Adrian Maybanks. He discovered that of 657 weapons used in armed robberies in the Metropolitan area from January 1988 to 30 June 1991—a period of three and a half years—about half turned out on investigation to be imitation firearms. Of the remaining 328 firearms, only one had ever been within the lawful licensing system. Detective Inspector Maybanks concluded that a simplistic ban on one category of gun or on all legally owned guns was likely to be counterproductive, not least because it was bound to drive more guns underground.

I practised at the Bar for a number of years, and senior police officers have told me that guns used to commit crimes are normally held illegally. This legislation is an attempt to destroy the legitimate interest of law-abiding people in a sport that has always been lawful, in a totally vain attempt to shut the stable door after the horse has bolted, and to prevent maniacs from committing crimes. However, I am afraid that maniacs and other criminals will procure weapons illegally if they are determined to do so. That is the nature of the society in which we live.

If hon. Members believe that by supporting the Bill they will stop crime and maniacs, they are very much mistaken. They will simply destroy a legitimate sport which is enjoyed by literally thousands of our citizens. This is an example of hard cases making bad law, and the legislation is misconceived.

7.50 pm

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway): I shall also make my maiden speech this evening. So many hon. Members have made maiden speeches tonight describing so many parts of the United Kingdom that it occurs to me that visitors from abroad who are in the Strangers Gallery might have saved themselves the cost of a guide book.

I represent Medway and the historic cities of Rochester and Chatham. My immediate predecessor, Dame Peggy Fenner, represented Medway for 18 years and served for a time as Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. On 1 May, she came to the end of a long and distinguished career in public life as a local councillor and Member of Parliament. She was a formidable opponent and a politician of total integrity. In defeat, she was charm and graciousness itself. I pay tribute to her and wish her well. I know that all hon. Members would do the same.

Before Dame Peggy, Medway was represented by three equally formidable Labour Members: Bob Bean, whose tragic early death robbed us of a great parliamentarian; before him, the formidable Ann Kerr; and, before her, the equally formidable Arthur Bottomley. I treasure a letter sent to me by an octogenarian constituent immediately following the 1 May election. It says simply, "If you're half as good as Arthur, you will be all right". I shall do my best. One is entering an awesome pantheon and must bear an awesome weight, but it is made much lighter by the nature of one's constituency.

The historic towns of Rochester and Chatham are surrounded by beautiful and eccentric countryside. To the west, are the woods and hills of Kent and, to the east, the flat and daunting lands of the Hoo peninsula, with its sites of scientific interest and its teeming wildlife set against the industrial landscape of north Kent. We have the finest mediaeval castle in the country: discuss. We also own what is almost certainly the most dignified and perfectly formed cathedral.

[Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews]

In the middle of my constituency is the historic dockyard of Chatham, which, until comparatively recently, employed 17,000 of my constituents and those from neighbouring constituencies. If one seeks to discover the unique character of those who live in the Medway towns, one need look no further than the dockyard and the surrounding barracks and the industries that supported them.

We are a tough lot. We have been in the front line of conflict for 400 years against just about every European country. That has produced a breed of people in the Medway towns who are resilient and full of humour, but who are without prejudice or xenophobia. They do not, and would not, subscribe to the small-mindedness of view and the smallness of vision that sometimes masquerades as Euro-scepticism. Rochester is proud to be a European city. It lies at the gateway to Europe and, with a new council and unitary authority in place, we look forward to addressing some of the problems that have beset the Medway towns in the past 20 years.

We lost no less than 70 per cent. of our manufacturing base in that time and we are the largest conurbation in Europe without its own university. During my stewardship, one of my principal aims will be to see the laying of the foundation stone of a new academic institution—possibly the first university of Europe—in that area. We deserve it because we have not only a long tradition of science, technology and engineering, but an unrivalled cultural tradition in the arts and literature. We are the spiritual home of the greatest novelist ever to write in the English language. I could take you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Hoo peninsula to visit the graveyard where the infant Pip met his eventual benefactor, the convict Magwitch, who—if my memory serves me aright—was being pursued by hounds. That is another pastime that I hope we shall see the end of during this Administration.

I turn to the debate in hand. I shall be brief because hon. Members have rehearsed accurately and succinctly—save in one or two cases—the arguments with which we must deal. I immediately declare an interest in the debate and it has been mentioned already. This morning I received a telephone call from someone who described himself as the agent of the parliamentary rifle club. The agent asked me whether I was related to the chair of the Gun Control Network. I do not know why an agent had to ask me that question—I would have answered just as readily if I had been asked in the Members Lobby. The answer is yes. I am not ashamed of that fact and, what is more, I declare a further interest in that I have played some small—and I mean a very small—part in the workings of that organisation, which is the principal campaigner for the total abolition of handguns in the United Kingdom.

In the course of that work, I have had the rare privilege of working with a number of those who were bereaved as a result of the Hungerford and Dunblane tragedies. I take issue immediately on their behalf with one of the comments by the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins). I assure him and the House, with all the force that I can command, that those people do not seek revenge on society for the horror inflicted upon them. I have never worked with a more rational group of people whose only interest is to ensure that that horror is not visited upon others. They understand better than anyone that legislation of this sort will create casualties and that it will cut across the civil liberties of others. I assure the House that those who work towards this aim take no pleasure from that fact and do not seek revenge. This organisation and this legislation has only one aim: to ensure that the children of Dunblane, of Scotland and of the rest of the United Kingdom grow up in a safer place.

There is only one predication: will the legislation work? If it does not, there is no point in enacting it, and on that basis I make common cause with those who have spoken against the Bill. There is no right inherent in the House or anywhere else to remove people's civil liberties, or their pleasures or fun, in the interests of something that is simply vanity. In considering whether the Bill will work if it is enacted, however, let me adopt the legal metaphor that was used by the hon. Member for Surrey Heath; the burden of proof comes into play, and the burden of proof changed after Dunblane. We do not ask ourselves whether the Bill will work. Instead, we ask, "If there is any chance whatsoever of this proposed legislation helping at all in any circumstances to stop a Dunblane happening again, should we pass it?"

I say to the hon. Member for Surrey Heath and to others who have spoken articulately against the Bill that when the issue is put to the acid test there is only one choice, and that is to go into the Lobby in support of the Bill.

I, too, have some facts and statistics. It is incontrovertible in terms of international statistics that the countries that are the most liberal in their gun laws also have the largest gun ownership. Those countries that have the largest gun ownership have also the largest illegitimate use of guns, mainly in the commission of homicide.

It is perfectly possible to say that America is a special case. It is a frontier society with a culture of violence. It is a new society. The same cannot be argued for law-abiding, clock-making Switzerland. There, after centuries of liberalisation of gun control, where 13 times more people hold guns than are held in this country legitimately, there are 10 times more homicides caused by firearms than in the UK. The list continues and reaches Japan, which is not known for its law-abiding behaviour. It should be recognised, however, that Japan has had the courage to ban handguns. It is at the bottom of the international league for crimes committed with illegally held weapons.

Another statistic cannot be ignored. In the United States there is by head of population, amazingly enough, only three times the number of murders that take place in the UK that are not committed with handguns. If handguns are included in the equation, however, the United States have 150 times more murders than us. If we want to step down that road even a short way, we shall continue to license and keep within our culture the legitimate use of handguns.

That brings me to my next point, which has been largely ignored during the debate. Why is there a direct equation between the legitimate ownership of handguns and their illegitimate use? I suggest that there are two reasons for that. The first is the crude question of opportunity. The more guns that are available the more they will be used, and the more that they will find their way into illicit hands. Secondly, the more liberal that we are in our gun legislation the more we are seen tacitly to

condone and support a gun culture. The more that we tacitly support that culture the easier it will be for people to obtain guns and commit crimes with them.

I do not suppose, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you have seen some of the films the names of which I could reel off, having made a study of these matters. In our youth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, together perhaps, we used to see films such as "High Noon" or the romances based on that film, during which people were shot and fell over. That happened five or six times during the film, normally at the end. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could take you to see current films during which there is a death or a maiming by handguns every 17 seconds. The victims do not merely fall over. There are the most graphic details that the cinema of today can produce.

There is a gun culture and we live in unhappy and violent times. We cannot control that. In a free society it is difficult to produce such controls. But let us send a collective message from the House, in representing the people of the United Kingdom, that we shall not tolerate as part of a gun culture the legitimate use and handling of firearms. Let us make it clear that they will be outlawed despite the fact that there will be casualties. Those of us who feel strongly about these matters take no joy in that consequence, including those with whom I work. To use an unparliamentary expression, all this stuff about the Olympics being put in jeopardy by the banning of handguns is pure bunkum. The argument has been cooked up to produce a smokescreen.

It is perfectly possible to organise the Olympics on the basis that we do not participate in one sport. We do not participate in some canoeing events that involve three or four people with paddles. That has done has no harm in the Olympic games and we can still stage them in Manchester. It is unlikely that the canoes of which I speak will appear on the Manchester waterways. At the same time, as a sportsman, I feel considerable compassion for the sportsmen and women who will be involved. Undoubtedly, however, the greater good must prevail.

I can say as a lawyer that the licensing and regulation of handguns is, in reality, impossible. We shall never devise a system that will stop someone like Thomas Hamilton getting possession of a legal firearm. Those who are charged with licensing guns adopt a discretion. My lawyer friend, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), nods and he knows well what I am about to say, which is that that discretion must be judicial. The use of prescience or the concept that someone is unpleasant and therefore should not have a handgun would not be a way of depriving individuals of ownership. That is exactly the Thomas Hamilton case. There were many people who felt that he should not have had a gun, but an advised decision was taken that he had to have it. That will happen again. There is only one way out of the conundrum and that is a total ban.

I urge right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken against the Bill to accept that the honourable course is to impose a total ban. I pay tribute to Bob Hughes, who is no longer a Member—he was a casualty at Harrow, West—but who had the courage to break his own Whip when this issue was last debated. There were many good reasons for the Tories losing Harrow, West, but Bob Hughes's espousal of the cause that I have presented was certainly not one of them. He worked closely with the Gun Control Network and with its chairman, my wife. That resulted in her having the perhaps unsavoury distinction of appearing in two election addresses in a general election, one Tory and one Labour.

I commend the Bill to the House. I have been proud to play some part in the efforts of the campaigning teams that, I hope, have assisted Members in the preparation of the Bill. For the reasons that I have set out, I urge Members to accept that the Government's proposal, regrettable though it might be, is the only way in which safety can be ensured.

8.8 pm

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall–Andrews) on a splendid and memorable first speech. Dickens might have found a spiritual home in the proud city of Portsmouth. He was born in the city, a fact of which we are extremely proud.

I am probably unknown to many Members, but I think that it is 10 years ago to the day that I was last a Member of this place.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Where is David Owen now?

Mr. Hancock: That is a good point: if the hon. Member knows, there are others who want to know.

I pay tribute to my predecessor. I thank him on behalf of the people of Portsmouth, South for the efforts that he put in on their behalf. I am sure that David Martin will be remembered by those for whom he worked. As I have said, he put in a great deal of effort on behalf of many people. I know that from correspondence that I have received since 1 May. I wish him and his family all the best for the future.

I am delighted to speak after a Member representing another naval constituency. It was nice to hear Chatham spoken of in such dignified terms. I speak as one who represents the finest of all British cities; I hate to contradict the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), who made his maiden speech yesterday, but I am sure that, when he spoke of the fair city of Lancaster, he forgot to include Portsmouth in what he judged to be the country's finest cities.

I am very happy to represent Portsmouth, South again. I had the privilege and pleasure of serving the constituency some 10 years ago, and well remember the opportunities that that afforded me to speak on behalf of the people of Portsmouth. Much has changed in the intervening time, however.

We in Portsmouth have struggled to come to terms with the rundown of the defence industries, and have fought magnificently to rekindle enthusiasm within the city for its future. We look forward with great expectation to the developments associated with our gaining of Millennium Commission support for a major project in our city. I am sure that the hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) will join me in wishing Portsmouth all the best, in the hope that those endeavours will come to fruition in time for them to be celebrated in the millennium year. We trust that the whole nation will share in the occasion.

We also celebrate the success of our football team, led and managed by Mr. Terry Venables—who no doubt will bring much enjoyment to Portsmouth if he succeeds in

[Mr. Hancock]

bringing players from down under to play at Fratton Park in the coming season, delivering the success that we have been narrowly denied during the past three or four years.

Portsmouth is a very special place. It is a cosmopolitan city; it is the home of the Royal Navy, and of one of the United Kingdom's newest universities. It has contributed to the history of the nation for 2,000 years, and it is incredibly proud of those traditions. Only last week, we unveiled a statue of one of the United Kingdom's greatest heroes, Lord Montgomery, on our seafront, and in a few days' time we shall celebrate the success of our task force in the Falklands war. Portsmouth needs to be represented well in this place. That is why it is important for the voice of its people to be heard in regard to the issue that we are discussing.

I congratulate the Home Secretary on the courageous way in which he presented the Bill today: I am sure that he could have found an easier way—he could have run away from some of the difficult points that were put to him—but he denied no interruption, and gave hon. Members every opportunity to put him on the spot in regard to sporting issues. I heard him say that he had been assured that the Commonwealth games would not be threatened by the legislation, and I accept that he had researched that. He also promised that he would look into the position regarding the Olympic games.

I must declare an interest: I have a firearms certificate, and have had one for a long time. I have fired pistols and rifles for nearly two decades. I have enjoyed the hospitality, friendship and comradeship of shooters in this country and abroad, and have enjoyed the privilege and pleasure of shooting on many ranges in this country. I have done that in the knowledge that I was enjoying a sport—but I have not fired a gun since the Dunblane massacre. This morning, before coming to the House, I handed my last firearm in to the Portsmouth police station.

I have my current firearms certificate with me. It is quite interesting. I am sure that not many of my constituents are aware that it was—and legally still is—possible for me to possess five weapons, all of them capable of killing people. I could have had nearly 2,000 rounds of ammunition in my home at any one time, but I am glad to say that I now have none of those things. I handed in my last weapon today, because anyone speaking in a debate such as this becomes extremely vulnerable as soon as he says that he owns guns. His property becomes vulnerable to people who would use an opportunity to gain access to a weapon.

We should all be concerned about the fact that 500 legally owned guns were stolen in the last year for which statistics exist. People may think that their weapons are secure. They may do what I did, and break weapons down, storing ammunition and pistols in separate containers and in different parts of the house. But they can never be sure that a chance burglary will not happen—or, indeed, a premeditated burglary. The burglar may know that someone is a gun enthusiast.

Since Dunblane, however, I have been unable to bring myself to support the idea that anything other than a total ban would be acceptable to the British people. Given that, according to the latest poll, 83 per cent. of people support such a ban, I cannot conceive that there is now any excuse for us to do other than support the Bill. I say that with a great deal of heartache: I feel sad for people who have enjoyed the sport for much longer than I have—the people who offered me friendship, and encouraged me to use their weapons and ranges to enjoy the sport of shooting. I know what a wrench it will be for them to be denied that opportunity.

Many disabled people have found that shooting is the one thing that makes them live again. I have met a number of those people, and have recently presented awards to some of them. I have also helped to develop the techniques used by some whose ambition is to learn to shoot. However, there are other ways in which such people can develop their potential. Their weapons will not be outlawed. I am sure that many paraplegics will turn to air weapons if they still want to shoot.

I am not at all worried that we as a nation will be forbidden to bid for future major sporting events, and I think that it is a travesty to suggest that that in itself would be a good reason not to ban weapons. I commend the Home Secretary for defending his position so forthrightly today.

The police will have less of a burden. They will not have to deal with the day-to-day routine tasks that the last Government's legislation would have increased dramatically. As the Home Secretary pointed out, the Bill will enable the police to devote more energy to ridding the nation of illegally held weapons, and of people who systematically peddle weapons. There will be no excuse now, because, after the three-month handing-in period, all legally held weapons should no longer be available.

I thought it unforgivable that the former Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), should suggest that legitimate gun owners would go underground. I considered that a slur of the worst possible kind, and, as a firearms certificate holder, I took offence personally. How outrageous it was that the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not refer to public safety as an important factor. He found every excuse under the sun for not recommending the Bill, but not once did he address the issue of whether we would live in a safer nation if we banned handguns. I found that a sad and startling omission.

I was also disappointed that so many Conservative Members tried to hide the true issue by supporting shooting activities among the disabled. I felt that that undersold and undervalued their contribution, and I thought it sad that Conservative Members had sunk to such a level, given that the nation had demanded that Parliament balance the issues carefully and then decide.

I have no hesitation in giving the Bill my whole-hearted support. It is right, proper and long overdue. An opportunity was missed, not last year but after Hungerford. That is when the true tragedy of Dunblane occurred. With hindsight, it just may be that we can look back and say that, if only we had seized that opportunity—it is a big if—Dunblane might not have happened.

Tonight, we have the opportunity to give the Bill a Second Reading, to give it a fair wind in Committee, and to wish it well on Third Reading, and the nation has the opportunity to get behind it. I am sure that most reasonable people will feel that there is nothing but justice

in what the Government are trying to achieve this evening. I believe that, on balance, the Government have got it right, and that the Bill is worthy of support.

8.20 pm

Mr. Graham Stringer (Manchester, Blackley): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me. I had not intended to speak. I was looking forward to making my maiden speech on a subject which I knew rather more about, possibly the arcane workings of local government finance, or some such thing. But because the Commonwealth games and the Olympic games have been mentioned so much, about which I know quite a lot, having led, with Sir Bob Scott, Britain's bid for the Olympics in 1996 and 2000, and having led the successful English bid for the Commonwealth games in 2002, I decided to try to participate.

First, in accordance with the traditions of the House, I am delighted to pay my respects to my predecessor, Ken Eastham. Ken Eastham was elected to the House in 1979, but I had known him for some time before that. I must be one of the few new Members who have known their predecessor for most of their life. Ken could sometimes appear a little dour, but he did his work extraordinarily well, and behind that facade there were often extreme acts of kindness above and beyond the usual advice bureau work that one would expect from an MP, and which in Ken's case one got—both his constituents and new members of the Labour party.

For example, when I joined the Labour party in the early 1970s, a long time before new Labour, I lived in the area that Ken represented as a local councillor. That was at a time in the inner city when the ease of access to the Labour party was often in inverse proportion to the number of members that the Labour party had in that branch. In addition, young, opinionated, new graduates were also not often welcomed into inner-city Labour parties. Those parties were often said to be closed. But Ken Eastham went out of his way to help me along in the Labour party, and to support me in a way that at that time was quite unusual.

It was also at that time as a councillor that Ken took up the fight against corruption and what has more recently been called sleaze. He ran a long campaign against some dodgy contracts in which the local authority was involved, and had them changed. As a Member of this House, he was always the hammer of corruption. He spoke out against sleaze on a number of occasions, and that fitted well with his personality—that of an upright man reeking of integrity.

I shall just mention one other part of his work which I hope to follow. Although the British Aerospace factory at Chadderton is not within the Manchester, Blackley constituency, many of my constituents work there. Ken was tireless in trying to get contracts for British Aerospace in order to ensure that the people he represented stayed in work. Ken will be sadly missed as the Member for Blackley, and I hope to follow in his footsteps.

I was delighted on my election to receive a letter from the previous Member for Blackley, Paul Rose. I had not seen him since he decided to retire at an early age in 1979. He was elected to the Chamber in 1964, when he was the youngest Member of the House. He could still be the Member for Blackley, because he worked hard, he fought against racism and he was a good constituency MP. His letter of congratulations told me—something which I did not know—that he is now a coroner in the south of England. I hope also to follow in the tradition of Paul Rose.

It is also traditional in a maiden speech to talk about one's constituency—in my case, Manchester, Blackley, which the BBC often annoyingly pronounces incorrectly when giving election results. I have listened to a number of maiden speeches today and on previous occasions, when hon. Members have laid claim to win the competition to represent the most beautiful constituency in the country.

Unfortunately, I would not enter Blackley in that competition. Its people are wonderful, and the constituency has many attributes, but I do not think that anyone would believe me if I said that it has the best scenery in the United Kingdom—it does not. However, it has, if not the largest, one of the largest municipal parks in Europe, which is often visited and which will in the near future benefit from lottery money—Heaton park. It also has one of the three oldest municipal parks—Queen's park—which, again, we hope will receive money from the lottery fund. Along with Phillips park and a park in Salford, it was one of the first municipal parks.

The constituency also benefited from the first modern tram system to be introduced in Britain, which runs between the city centre and Bury in the north and Altrincham in the south. I hope during my period as Member of Parliament to extend that system to other parts of the constituency, which will benefit enormously.

I said that the constituency is not beautiful. It is a traditional industrial area, with many houses, which suffered enormously during the recessions of the early 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, each one biting into its economic and employment base further than the other. We lost the Ferranti factory when Ferranti went bankrupt, British Aerospace has contracted and ICI, turning into Zeneca, has also contracted. One of the most important tasks, and one reason for supporting the Government's programme, is to bring jobs back to Blackley and to ensure that the existing industry expands and employs more people.

As unemployment in the constituency has risen, so many of the social conditions have become worse. There is considerable poverty in parts of the constituency. Much of the housing in the private and public sector needs much investment. There is a great deal to do within the constituency, and I look forward to many of the Government's Bills which will improve that situation.

One of the ways in which the constituents of Blackley will find employment is as a result of the Commonwealth games in 2002. The job creation potential of major international sporting events, particularly multi-sporting events, is not generally known. It is estimated that the Commonwealth games will produce about the same number of jobs as half a car-manufacturing plant. I should like many of those jobs to go to people within Blackley and its immediate area, where most of the games will take place—Manchester, Central.

Therefore, I am concerned with some of the comments that have been made in the debate, suggesting that in some way the Commonwealth Games will not take place in Manchester in 2002. They will take place, and I will explain why.

[Mr. Graham Stringer]

There is a contract between the bidding city, Manchester city council, and the Commonwealth Games Federation, the international body which is the equivalent of the International Olympic Committee. Within that, there are only two reasons for taking away the Commonwealth Games. First, a natural disaster, an earthquake, a riot or a major event would prevent the games from taking place. Secondly, the games would be stopped if they were not properly organised. One cannot predict natural disasters, but they are unlikely in Manchester. We will organise an excellent games, not only for Manchester but for the whole of the United Kingdom. It will be the largest multi-sport event to take place in this country since the 1948 Olympic games.

I am grateful to the Home Secretary for his comments about the shooting event in the games. He said that he would use his powers to allow it to take place. He paid me a tribute, for which I am thankful. I thought that the tradition was for hon. Members to receive praise after they had made their maiden speech and not before, but I am grateful for his remarks.

A Conservative Member gave 80 per cent. of the story of why shooting is part of the games. It is correct that Manchester's original bid did not include shooting. We won the English nomination against London, and Sheffield withdrew. We had no competitors in Bermuda. The biggest hurdle we had to get over was obtaining the English nomination. We had not included shooting, although, by certain criteria, it is the third most popular sport in the Commonwealth games. When we decided which sports to include, we listed costs against income, the number of spectators that watch the sports, the history of the sport and other obvious criteria. After we had done that, shooting dropped out.

When we got to Bermuda, the shooting lobbies from New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and the Falklands drew up a petition and asked us to include the event. It is inconceivable that, at that stage, having got the English nomination and having passed all the necessary tests, we would not have been awarded the games even if we had not included shooting. We were to get the nomination, and we wanted everyone to be happy.

The Sports Council was on our delegation, and it said that it would do everything that it could to provide the funds for a shooting range. So we included shooting, and the Commonwealth Games Federation was delighted. It was not a condition, and even if we took the most extreme position and shooting were to be excluded—which it will not be because of the commitment given by the Home Secretary—it would not prevent the Commonwealth games from coming to England in 2002.

There is no doubt that the event will be affected. It is not well known that seven home countries compete in the Commonwealth games, including Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Northern Ireland, which is not included in the Bill. Representatives from those countries will still be able to train and compete, but the event will be affected because English, Welsh and Scottish pistol shooters will not be able to train if the Bill is passed.

In Bermuda, I gave a commitment to the Commonwealth Games Federation that shooting would be included. It will be included, given the Home Secretary's assurance, but it will be a different competition from the one intended.

I have listened to the debate, and have thought about the issues a great deal. A balance has to be struck between individual liberties and the potential for another Dunblane. I am persuaded that, on balance, the Bill is right. However, I gave a personal commitment to the Commonwealth Games Federation, and we are now in a different position for understandable reasons.

Although I am persuaded of the arguments, I feel that in all honour I shall have to abstain on this issue. I do not like abstaining, because we must make a decision, but I have no alternative, given the situation and the fact that I presented the case on behalf of Manchester and England. I hope that I have clarified a number of issues surrounding the Commonwealth games.

8.35 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to give my maiden speech. I am privileged to represent the new Arundel and South Downs constituency. As many hon. Members may know, it is a beautiful part of England. It nestles under the south downs and is twice the size of the Isle of Wight. It comprises parts of five previous constituencies, the three main ones being Horsham, Arundel and Mid-Sussex. As is traditional, I shall pay tribute to all five Members of Parliament from whom I have taken over, particularly the three who represented the main constituencies.

Sir Peter Hordern was a Member of the House for 33 years. He was enormously respected both here and in the constituency. He was a member of the Public Accounts Committee and the 1922 Committee. He was one of the early disciples of Enoch Powell, in that he understood that this country could not achieve economic success without a sufficient market economy. I am delighted that the Prime Minister seems to have understood that, even if his deputy has not yet done so.

To the west, Sir Michael Marshall represented Arundel for 23 years. He is greatly loved in the constituency and in the House, and remains in Arundel. I viewed him as a model of an utterly decent Member of Parliament. He is also the author of five books, including a biography of Jack Buchanan. Like me, he worked in India for a while and shares my great love of that country. In recent years, he made a considerable contribution to the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

To the east, Tim Renton, now Lord Renton, represented Mid-Sussex for 23 years. He served as Chief Whip, as Under-Secretary and as Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and at the Home Office. Following his retirement, Tim Renton has become chairman of the Sussex Downs Conservation Board, where he will have an important role in protecting the beauty of our environment—a subject to which I shall return.

The two other previous Members are Michael Stephen, because a small part of Shoreham has come into my constituency, and Tony Nelson, who represented Chichester. Their successors either have already paid or will pay tribute to those two, so I shall simply say that the House will be all the poorer without Michael Stephen's contribution on law and order debates, and that Tony Nelson made a great contribution both at the Treasury and at the Board of Trade.

When the new constituency was created, there were great rows not only about the boundary changes but about the name, because Arundel is right in the west of the

constituency, which also contains three other old parliamentary boroughs—Hurstpierpoint, Steyning and Bramber.

Those boroughs have a fascinating history. The great Wilberforce represented Bramber—although he did not know where it was at the time, because it was the third rottenest borough. I discovered that one John Major represented Steyning for about 20 years, until the Reform Act of 1832 abolished the "labour" vote that had sustained him. Arundel has had the support of the great and talented Norfolk family, which continues to this day both in the country at large and in the county.

Many others made great contributions in the past. For instance, Richard Cobden, the apostle of free trade, lived just down the road. To come right up to date, I can add that many of the British citizens who have gone about the world to make their careers and build businesses in Asia retire to our part of the world, and have contributed enormously to this country and its interests.

The constituency today consists of five market towns—Henfield, Hurstpierpoint, Steyning, Arundel and Pulborough—with their surrounding villages. If there is one common major issue, it is the desire to preserve that part of west Sussex as we have inherited it. It is only an hour away from London, and is under the threat of urbanisation.

Half the constituency is a designated area of outstanding natural beauty, and if the demands for housing, roads and gravel pits that much of today's bureaucracy brings were accepted, the other half of the constituency would be ruined. In that connection, the Sussex Downs Conservation Board has been an interesting and innovative concept. It is not a national park, but it takes on many of the responsibilities of one, without the planning role.

Finally, I was amused to discover that the house that my wife and I bought in Arundel was apparently the centre of Britain's defences against European invasion along the south coast in the Napoleonic wars. The closer we get to the south coast, the more people seem to become sensitive about their nationhood.

That brings me to the subject of the debate. During the election campaign, it seemed to me that the issue that people cared about most on the doorsteps was what our future vis-à-vis Europe would be. However, I had far more letters on the gun issue than on any other subject. They were all critical of the 1997 Act passed by the Tory Government, and enormously fearful that if there were a new Labour Government, the politically correct policy of a complete ban would be embraced.

I have discovered that in Sussex we have 60 of the total of 1,600 gun clubs, with nearly 2,000 members between them—no doubt because that part of the world is fairly close to Bisley. I am not a shooter; it has not been my sport. However, like the other hon. Members who have spoken in the debate, I have thought hard and long about the subject. I believe that a law-abiding minority are suffering injustice, to no proven end. The logical conclusion of what many people who support a complete ban on pistol shooting and gun clubs have said would be to stop any activity if there were any risk that it could lead to people being killed.

The nation's hearts went out to the families and parents at Dunblane, but when I think about the tragedy, I think particularly about people who are mentally unstable and let loose in society who may kill people with guns, poleaxes or whatever. A personal friend of mine is worried that her 23-year-old son, who is in society being minded by a 23-year-old lady, might kill somebody, and there is nothing that she can do to stop it. It is strange that the whole focus is on the means, and not on the bigger problem in society—how we strike the balance in protecting society from people who are mentally unstable.

I pay great tribute to the speech by the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), who covered most of the details and meat of the issue with great eloquence. I have certainly learned a lot this evening. My perception is that the 1997 Act—passed by the previous Conservative Government—has imposed a tighter regime here than anywhere outside of Japan, but we have not had time to see how it works. We are in no way a gun culture society—although I might add that if there is a risk of becoming so, it will come from the media and not from gun clubs. The Act was passed following much national debate and agony in the House, and the correct thing to do would be to let it work for a year or so to see what happens.

I am nervous about the argument that banning all guns will make the life of the police easier, as we all know that the real danger—as with prohibition, when the Americans did something similar in a different area—is if a police force gets sloppy in trying to police illegal guns. The crucial issue is how we prevent weapons of any sort from falling into the wrong hands, and we must not give the police an easy ride in doing that.

Many of the speeches in the debate made me uncomfortable, and contained an overkill of political correctness. I was reminded of other issues, when the House has gone overboard in reacting to tragic events, and when the first reaction has been to legislate after the event and over the top. Are measures produced to appease public opinion, or because Governments try to get out of their future responsibilities? We should stand back and think long and hard about these problems—as with similar legislation in the past on dangerous dogs and even on financial services. One does not stop crooks by passing legislation. One will not stop madmen and murderers by getting rid of guns.

Some 60,000 people are to be told casually that they cannot do their sport. We must get the balance right between protecting the majority and looking after the liberty of the minority. I am immensely unhappy at the ease with which people are prepared to ditch the interests of the minority.

The Cullen report was the professional investigation into the subject, and I wish to end—as did another speaker—by stating the conclusion of the report. Lord Cullen—I know well that the 1997 legislation did not follow all his recommendations—said:

> "I do not consider that the banning of handguns for target shooting or the banning of shooting clubs would be justified. I cannot see that there is any argument that that banning would make the risk of another Dunblane occurring any the less."

Many of those involved are simply scoring political points and trying to appease public opinion.

I want to defend my constituents of all political persuasions against the imposition of a tyranny. I very much hope that the House will allow the 1997 Act to operate before going over the top and enacting the Bill.

8.49 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I congratulate the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) on a thoughtful maiden speech. I have never been to the south downs, probably because they are a bit close to Europe for me, but his description made me want to go there; they must be almost as nice as Grimsby. I congratulate him also on his tributes to his five predecessors. That is approximately the working ratio in the Tory party after the election, with one Member replacing five. His tribute was entirely appropriate to the distinguished Members who preceded him.

I must declare a lack of interest, because I am not a gun enthusiast and I do not like the sport. I am terrified of guns and do not even like holding them, so I am not speaking from concern with guns and gun culture. I hope to argue that the rush of emotion is a bad basis for legislation.

We all feel strongly about Dunblane, but our responsibility in dealing with the consequences is to consider how best to prevent a repetition. The most rational and effective way of preventing it from happening again is not to rush into legislation. When the House rushes into legislation under a strong emotional influence, it always makes mistakes. We are perpetuating the rush that happened last year in the immediate aftermath of Dunblane.

I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) and for Medway (Mr. Marshall–Andrews), who made intimidatingly good maiden speeches, but, apart from the maiden speeches, we have merely heard a repetition of the speeches of November and December last year, perpetuating that rush into legislation.

The rational way is to think matters through. I hate having to differ from the bulk of people in my party, because I believe in the collective wisdom of parties and the way in which we help to shape each other's thought, but in this instance I believe that we should not go further down this road. We should hang on and think a little more.

The last piece of rushed legislation was about dangerous dogs—the persecution of pit bull terriers legislation—and it has been a disastrous mess. The rush to legislation that began with the 1997 Act has left several messy consequences that were not thought through at the time. It has left a far bigger bill for compensation than need be. We had estimates earlier this week of a total of £140 million or £150 million, and people may say that that is a price worth paying, but that is not the price, because the final bill will almost certainly be higher; we do not know how high. After this afternoon's financial statement, it is unreasonable for us to take on untold obligations. The cost could be £300 million, and I have heard even bigger estimates.

The Bill does nothing about illegal weapons, which are a major problem. It would have been far more effective if we had at the same time increased penalties and imposed greater sanctions on illegal weapons, which are far more numerous and more of a danger than legal weapons.

We are destroying the gun clubs, which are a means of restraint, of community and of people working together. In clubs, there is a discipline and people can keep an eye on each other. The gun clubs have been destroyed by the previous legislation. For example, in Grimsby, people have borrowed money, taken out extra mortgages and run up overdrafts to build up the gun club for their recreation and their sport. The club has suffered a huge loss of members, because they have been driven out. The members feel that they have become a distasteful minority. They face financial ruin, and the discipline that comes from the gun clubs will go. The gun clubs have been crippled, but we need them to provide a restraint on the use of weapons.

We should not ignore the effect of the Bill on the police. The Bill will have an impact on the proficiency of police firearms squads. At the moment, their official training is limited and their time on the range is limited, as are the number of rounds that they can fire and the style of shooting that they can adopt. When the police are in a stake-out, they cannot stand square as if they were on a range. Officers have supplemented their official training by joining gun clubs, at their own expense, and buying weapons. They have become more proficient, versatile and skilled and, therefore, much safer in their possession of weapons. That will stop and will be a severe setback for the squads.

The previous legislation has had the effects that I outlined. The Bill will compound the problem by banning .22s, which were not used in Dunblane. We shall repeat the same mistakes. In banning the weapons, we shall not ban the gun culture. We cannot legislate against the culture of guns, because that would mean the censorship and control of television, which encourages it. We do not try to ban the lad culture or the sex culture through legislation.

Legislation should not try to ban or eliminate the gun culture: it should try, in the most effective and cost-efficient way, to stop guns being available in public, carried in public and used in public. I return to the argument that has not been advanced by many hon. Members in today's debate, although it was made in November and by Lord Cullen. It is not an original argument. Lord Cullen suggested that the most effective way to deal with the problem was to require dismantling of guns. By the simple expedient of requiring part of the gun to be kept at the club and the other part to be taken home by the owner of the gun, we would stop complete guns being available in public.

That would be an effective, total ban, which would not require the paraphernalia of enforcement that the Bill will bring. It was Lord Cullen's preferred option. It is feasible, practical and would achieve our main purpose—to stop a repetition of Dunblane. It would not require enormous sums to be spent in compensation and it would mean that there was no point in criminals raiding gun clubs or the homes of gun owners, because one part would be kept at the club and one in the home and never the twain shall meet. That seems to me to be a more effective way to stop the theft of guns, the ramraiding of gun clubs or criminal or terrorist attacks on gun clubs.

Under a requirement to dismantle, if whole guns were found outside gun clubs, they would be, ipso facto, illegal. Such a provision would allow the sport to continue. I see little point in persecuting people. We are turning gun enthusiasts into an alienated, paranoid and persecuted minority. They are upset and almost hysterical about the way in which they have been treated. The Bill will not foster a culture of co-operation among gun owners. If we can allow the sport to continue, we should do so.

When the point about dismantling was put previously, it was met by the Government—I should say the then Government, because things improve all the time as life goes on—with many specious arguments. First, they said that not all guns could be dismantled. The answer to that is simple. If some cannot—I think that all can—they should be specifically banned. It is as easy as that.

Secondly, it was argued that people could fabricate parts of guns. That is true, but they could also fabricate whole guns. So that really is no answer. If dismantling were the basis of legislation, possession of a whole gun would be illegal. Then it was argued that dismantling was not foolproof. What is foolproof? The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 is not foolproof. What kind of breeding ground is the creation of a paranoid minority who fear that they are being deprived wrongly of their guns? No system is absolutely foolproof.

All those objections are true, but all are trivial and unimportant. If there is a will to legislate by the more rational means of requiring dismantling, we should use it.

Mr. Barnes: The answers given by the previous Government on dismantling were terribly thin. Not only were they incorrect, as my hon. Friend has shown, but they did not respond to the argument being put. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will respond to the points made by my hon. Friend. He knows that I support them. They are due serious answers before we vote.

Mr. Mitchell: The arguments were very thin. Thin is my description of arguments with which I disagree. Factually they were thin, too. The underlying concern was not to have dismantling, because the then Government wanted legislation. They wanted to show that they were doing something. They wanted to hang on to seats in Scotland. There was a threat in Scotland and they wanted to conciliate opinion there and show that they were responding to concerns. That is why they refused to listen to the argument. They had to have something to show to the Scottish electorate. That did not do them any good.

Now that that pressure is gone, we have an opportunity to rethink and take a cooler look. A cooler look would suggest looking again at what Lord Cullen proposed and asking ourselves whether that is the more effective way of dealing with the situation. Can we afford the scale of compensation? Should the Bill destroy the sport? Will the total ban work any better? I do not think that that is likely. We should answer such questions. It is very difficult to defeat totally the ingenuity of lunatics, as Hamilton was. We need a rational approach to the problem, to stop whole weapons being available among the public. Gun clubs and licensed, controlled premises should be the only places where guns can be reassembled.

I am in something of a quandary about to how to vote because I am in the unusual position of receiving a three-line Whip on a free vote. I shall sit here and hope that some kind of telepathy from the Whips Office tells me what to do. I have not yet got one of those little bleepers. When they go off in the middle of debates, some of my hon. Friends look happy—even ecstatic.

If I were approaching such legislation, I would not start from this point.

9.2 pm

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): I congratulate the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), for whom I have had a healthy regard, even since I have been reading his wife's columns in *The Times* on Saturdays, where she gives away all his personal secrets. He said that he knew very little about gun clubs, but he made an excellent speech on sensible, intelligent, well-thought-out and logical grounds. He also made a very good philosophical case against the Bill. That is not a party viewpoint; I think that he made a very good speech.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), who has just left the Chamber, on a first-class maiden speech. It is very difficult to make maiden speeches and I know that hon. Members often have butterflies in their stomachs. He paid due tribute to his predecessors and his constituency.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) made an excellent speech. I wish that I could make such a cogent speech without notes. I knew his predecessor well, because we served on the Select Committee on Employment together. He was a good man, who represented his constituents well. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will continue in the same vein. If I could just counsel him, although they may be grimy, he should see the streets of Manchester, Blackley as the most beautiful part of the United Kingdom. He should not be afraid to say that, because beauty is in the eye of the beholder. If the good burghers of Blackley have returned him to the House, he should not be afraid to stand up to say that it is the most beautiful part of the United Kingdom.

I regret to say that I find the Bill small-minded, mean and populist. I do not believe it will be good legislation, which is why I oppose it. My colleague on the Front Bench, my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean), will remember that I was unhappy about the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, which I considered to be similarly ill advised, but the Bill goes further and is far worse than that.

I have probably done more pistol shooting than most hon. Members, perhaps with the exception of the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook). I was paid to do it; it was not a sport, but something which I had to do in my working hours. Although I quite enjoyed it in those working hours, I cannot imagine why anyone would want to spend Saturday afternoons firing a pistol. Thousands of people, however, wish to spend their leisure hours firing pistols on ranges. They do no harm to anyone and they do not damage the country. They are perfectly law abiding and I would far rather that they did that than ran riot around our football grounds.

One must ask why the Bill proposes a ban on pistol shooting. First, it is a populist reaction to the ghastly tragedy of Dunblane. We all say that it was a tragedy, but we all truly believe that what happened at Dunblane was quite awful. It does not, however, justify the Bill.

The Home Secretary said that the Bill was designed to protect the public, but I do not follow the logic of that. A more august person than I referred to cricket bats, which was a reasonable reference to make, and the banning of motor cars has also been discussed. I wish that hon. Members would think about the "ingenuity of lunatics", to which the hon. Member for Great Grimsby has already referred. There was a ghastly case recently of a man who

[Mr. Andrew Robathan]

went to the home of his estranged wife and poured petrol through the letterbox, killing his sister-in-law and her three children. A couple of gallons of petrol can do just as much harm as a pistol, and Thomas Hamilton would have found that out quickly enough. It is pathetic to ban pistols when there are so many ways in which to harm others.

Of course I accept that the licensing procedures should be sorted out, because they operate badly. I agree with the hon. Member for Stockton, North that it was ill advised to issue a gun licence to Hamilton. That does not mean that we should stop thousands of law-abiding citizens from enjoying a sport. Cullen made some sensible recommendations and I urge those on the Government Front Bench to re-examine them carefully.

The second reason for the ban on pistols is the urge of some Members on the Government Benches to place restrictions on people. They are acting in a prescriptive and regulatory manner. It is the sign of a nanny Government. They are interested not in people's freedom, but in restricting what they may do.

I do not want to shoot, but it is sad that Labour Members, and possibly some of my hon. Friends on the Conservative Benches say, " I don't want to shoot, so you can't either." That is an authoritarian and unnecessary response. One might say the same thing about boxing. I do not wish to box, and many people are injured boxing, but many people came off the streets of the east end because of boxing clubs. They benefited from that by learning to fight in the clubs rather than beating each other up on the streets. Some people might still say, however, that one should ban boxing because it is so awful.

Some might argue that one should ban rugby football, union or league, because players break their necks. I know that many Labour Members, including some who agree with my argument, would ban hunting. I may not wish to hunt, but perfectly law-abiding people do so. They do not harm society and we should not ban their activity.

It has been said that tonight's Division will be a free vote. It may be a free vote, and I am sure that some Labour Members will vote—on a three-line whip—according to their consciences, but the political correctness that we have heard depressingly often in the speeches of Labour Members will reign, and there is no question but that the Bill will be passed. In the new Labour party, political correctness is reigning.

The 2002 Commonwealth games have already been mentioned, and I hope that they will be held in Manchester. However, those who are optimistic about Britain being considered for future Olympic games should think hard about the Bill. We would not be happy travelling to Olympic games in which we could not participate—sports such as the 100 m race or equestrian events. We would not support a bid to host games by a country that did not allow us to participate in a sport.

Mrs. McGuire: Can the hon. Gentleman name any other Olympic sport that must be regulated by police?

Mr. Robathan: That is a very interesting question, of which I should have liked to have notice. I suspect, however, that the hon. Lady will find that various so-called self-defence clubs, such as judo clubs, require regulation. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I certainly suspect that the use of sabres in fencing requires regulation. The hon. Lady is new to the House, and I do not think that her question is particularly relevant. Many sports require regulation, such as driving, which certainly requires police regulation. It may not be an Olympic sport, but it is a world sport.

The Government propose, most extraordinarily of all, that citizens of other countries should be able to walk our streets and fire their weapons, whereas British citizens will not be allowed to do so. That is a most extraordinary suggestion. Hon. Members have already mentioned disabled shooters. I will not revisit that issue, because other hon. Members wish to speak.

The hon. Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall–Andrews), who made an excellent maiden speech, asked whether the legislation will work, and said that that would be the test. The obvious answer is that it will not work, because it will not reduce the accessibility of handguns. The Bill will have a negligible impact on handgun accessibility. The hon. Member for Stockton, North said that there are perhaps 4 million firearms in the United Kingdom, and the police estimate that there are between 1 million and 4 million illegal firearms. How much more worrying are those weapons than those owned by law-abiding people who wish to practise their sport on a Saturday afternoon?

Much has been made in the debate about small-bore pistols, and the Home Secretary said that the SAS is armed with .22 weapons. I spent 15 years in the Army, and I can assure him that, should it be necessary to kill someone, we issue our armed forces with heavy-calibre weapons, because they have a longer range and a greater penetrating capability. The 9 mm weapon, which Thomas Hamilton used in Dunblane, is the standard-issue weapon for the British Army.

The legislation is small-minded, petty and indicative of a nanny state, and I regret it very much. I welcome the Home Secretary's comments on sorting out the violence on our streets that is committed with or without illegal firearms and pistols. The Bill, however, will not sort out that violence and has nothing to do with such violence. The Bill will only destroy the sport of law-abiding people who wish to do something that does not harm anyone. Simply because hon. Members do not wish to fire pistols on Saturday afternoons, that does not mean that we should destroy the sport for others. The Bill is a profoundly bad bit of legislation, and the House would be very unwise to approve it.

9.13 pm

Mr. Anthony Colman (Putney): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I should like to start by congratulating hon. Members who made their maiden speeches today, including my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon (Angela Smith), for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey), for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) and for Medway (Mr. Marshall–Andrews) and the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight). I also commend the tremendous work done by those in the Gun Control Network, particularly Mrs. Marshall-Andrews. As a local government leader, I led the movement within London borough councils to pass resolutions proposing a total handgun ban, which were adopted by UK local government associations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Medway mentioned a previous Conservative Member for Harrow, West, but, of course, another former Conservative Member broke with his party on the issue of handguns—David Mellor. I have before me a copy of the speech he made on 18 November 1996. It makes good reading and I agree with every word he spoke that evening.

Hon. Members may not know that, at the general election, there was a Sportsmen's Alliance candidate, Mr. Mike Yardley, standing against David Mellor and me in Putney. His sole manifesto pledge was to oppose what David Mellor and I both wanted—a total ban on handguns. Mr. Yardley called for a national march down Putney high street to show the strength of feeling on the issue; there were signs all along the A3 and 10,000 people were expected. I have to inform the House that, in fact, 75 people turned up. They were outnumbered by the police, of whom there were 78. A further 140 police officers were standing by as back-up, but they were obviously not needed.

I remind the House of the deplorable scenes at the Putney count, which were led by the Sportsmen's Alliance candidate along with Sir James Goldsmith. I know that Sir James is now seriously ill, but I would hope that Mr. Yardley has reconsidered his actions and realised that they were not that which is expected in this country. Hon. Members might ask how many votes Mr. Yardley got—the answer is 90, out of an electorate of 60,000. There are some 150 shooters in Putney, who between them own about 350 handguns, of which 50 are .22 calibre. As the Putney police remarked to me this morning, the public are clearly in favour of a total ban on handguns as proposed in the Bill.

Mr. Gray: As the hon. Gentleman is making such extensive use of statistics on shooters, does he recall the rally in Trafalgar square, at which tens of thousands of people turned up to support the shooters' cause? How does that fit in with his use of minute statistics on rallies?

Mr. Colman: All I can suggest is that the debate that followed in the press and in the House convinced the other 9,925 that their cause was not one to back. I confirm that only 75 people turned up in Putney high street.

Mr. Robathan: Does the hon. Gentleman not believe that the role of this House, among others, is to defend the rights of minorities?

Mr. Colman: I do indeed. The minority exercised their right to hold their march in Putney and those 75 people were extremely well protected by the 78 police officers.

I am against the alternative of storing handguns at gun clubs, as are the police. I have a personal reason for that. Some years ago, my brother Ronald Colman, a police constable in King's Lynn, was called out after a break-in at a local gun club armoury and he cornered the criminals in the local sports pavilion. He did not call for back-up, although he should have done, and found himself looking down the barrel of a .22 gun. I remind hon. Members that a .22 can kill at a range of more than two miles and he was staring at the gun from a distance of 10 ft. He nevertheless went in unarmed and disarmed the two criminals. He was subsequently awarded the British Empire Medal and I am proud of my brother for what he did that day.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)—we must not hang on; we must go forward with this Bill.

9.18 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly tonight—all the more so because I am conscious of the fact that it is only a couple of weeks since I made my maiden speech. In the short time available to me, I wish to pick up on three points that I thought were of some importance while listening to the debate. I shall run through them in explaining why I oppose the Bill.

Leaving aside the earlier legislation—which I would not have been able to support—and focusing only on the ban, the first point that struck me about the Bill was the Home Secretary's inability to provide any rational or valid argument for why .22 weapons should be included in the ban. I listened to him carefully and asked him at the outset whether he could produce some Home Office statistics to back up the use of .22 weapons in the commission of crime. No such statistics exist. Anecdotal evidence, some of which I derived from my experience as a barrister doing criminal cases, is that their use by organised criminals is virtually non-existent.

I accept that .22s may have been used on occasion in cases of domestic violence, but a range of weapons is available, from the kitchen knife downwards, all of which weapons are impossible to legislate against. Anyone who applied a moment's thought to the matter would realise that it would be impossible to do so.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman is being so dismissive of the logic of others that I wonder whether he would examine his own logic. Will he explain how his collection of information and analysis was derived during his practice in the courts?

Mr. Grieve: The Minister has been unable to produce any Home Office statistics—

Mr. Michael: Answer the question.

Mr. Grieve: I will come to it. I can talk with my colleagues—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I can. It is one of the advantages of people coming to this House from a wide range of professional backgrounds. The Minister is flippant to dismiss that. We, at least, have the opportunity to talk among ourselves and we hear about whether and what weapons have been used. In my early years of practice going around the courts in London and the south-east, and whether I was having breakfast in the Bar mess or sitting in a court, I never came across an instance of a .22 used in the way suggested. That is all that I can say to the Minister and the House. As the Minister cannot come up with any better information, he should not gainsay my point of view.

Secondly, I do not understand how the exception under the section 5 licence will work. I very much hope that the Minister will explain whether the exemption will apply only to foreigners coming to this country to participate in games, or whether it will also apply to any British citizen wishing to participate in those games and wishing to have access to a .22 pistol, if necessary, by bringing it in from abroad. I listened carefully to the Home Secretary and

[Mr. Grieve]

detected a note of hesitation on that point. I should be grateful if the matter could be clarified before the end of the debate.

We will be left with one of two positions. The first is that an exception is made to allow a British—or English, Scottish or Welsh—team to participate in games in this country, notwithstanding the fact that they have been refused access to pistols for training purposes, in which case the ludicrous nature of the Bill will become apparent. Alternatively, the Home Secretary does not intend to allow the aborigines the rights that he will grant to people coming into this country, in which case—and leaving aside the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights—he will find that his susceptibility to judicial review will make the life of his predecessor in that respect pale into insignificance. I hope that those points will be dealt with before the debate is concluded.

I want to make a final point. It has been touched on occasionally, but generally hon. Members have skated away from it. Gun clubs and shooting clubs were mainly set up in the late 19th century and they had a civic role. That may no longer be a popular theme, but people who learned to shoot—initially mainly men—regarded it as a civic virtue. It was thought that people should learn how to shoot. Before the days of sex equality, it was regarded as a manly accomplishment.

It was also thought—this point has not been touched on, but should be—that people should learn how to shoot because that accomplishment might one day be used in the service of this country. We touched on that matter a little. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) pointed out that police officers make frequent use of the opportunities presented by shooting clubs to perfect their skills. Over the past 20 or 30 years, those virtues, as they used to be perceived, have been consistently denigrated by individuals who, for their own moral reasons—which I understand—regard such attitudes as archaic, militaristic and undesirable.

I have listened carefully to tonight's debate and much of the theme that I have picked up, particularly from the hon. Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire), is that, leaving aside the practicalities of the matter, the House is being asked to make a moral statement. That moral statement requires us to say, "We do not like handguns; they must go."

Mrs. McGuire: I did not say that I do not like handguns and they must therefore go. Those of us who supported the ban on handguns did so because they kill, and in Dunblane 16 children and their teacher were killed by a handgun. It is not just that I do not like them; they have a lethal purpose.

Mr. Grieve: I fully understand the hon. Lady's point. I took careful note of her words when she said that all handguns should be removed from our society, so I hope that I was not misquoting or misrepresenting her.

The strangest irony is that, ever since the trend that is now culminating in the destruction of shooting clubs began, the level of violence with handguns and all forms of weaponry has been rising. I believe that the two are linked. The more we get down to selfish, individualistic forms of society—*[Interruption.]* They are tolerated, because the House has never addressed the problem of how the culture of violence is foisted on our society. It has nothing whatever to do with gun clubs. That is precisely why, quite apart from resisting the Bill on a philosophical level, I am utterly convinced that it will have no bearing whatever on reducing the incidence of violence through the use of handguns. On the contrary; I am convinced that it will do the reverse. By destroying shooting clubs, which have served this country well by channelling that recreation and enthusiasm, we shall create more problems for ourselves. We disregard that at our peril.

I am a little distressed to note the reaction to what I hoped was an underlying point to commend to the House. It seems to be treated with a certain flippancy, which may be due to the fact that, as predicted earlier in this debate, the Chamber is now filling up with hon. Members who have not listened to previous speakers.

9.27 pm

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): The Bill is unnecessary, unfair and unduly costly. If it becomes law, thousands of law-abiding citizens throughout the country will be deprived of their sport and pastime with no guarantee whatever that the public will be any safer.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) said that whenever the state considers limiting the activities of its law-abiding citizens, it must have a compelling reason for doing so. The Government said tonight that they have. They believe that extending the ban imposed on higher calibre handguns by the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 to .22 pistols would increase public safety, yet they have produced no firm evidence or justification for that belief in this debate. As my right hon. and learned Friend said, it is not a proportionate response.

Clearly, this is new Labour playing to the gallery. The Government do not care how many individual freedoms they trample on as they continue their process of apparently announcing a ban a day.

Of course, we accept that to curtail individual freedom is perfectly legitimate if it serves a good purpose, but the Bill serves no good purpose. That was powerfully pointed out in some excellent maiden speeches tonight. I have had the privilege of hearing quite a few maiden speeches in my time, but the crop that I heard today from both sides was particularly splendid.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on his maiden speech. I can also pay tribute to the wonderful Dyson vacuum cleaner, which I understand is made in his constituency. I can confirm that it is the only vacuum cleaner that picks up the dog hair from my springer and retrievers. Having used up many hoovers over the years, I can testify that that one works. It was good to hear about other features of my hon. Friend's excellent constituency.

In his maiden speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) paid a good tribute to the many former Members who represented that composite constituency. He was right to say that, before rushing ahead, we should let the 1997 Act be implemented.

I congratulate all the Labour Members on their maiden speeches. I am pleased that all of them paid such generous tributes to their predecessors, whether they were Labour predecessors or, unfortunately, in too many cases, Conservative predecessors. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) made a good maiden speech. It is clear that he likes his constituency and he spoke with obvious sincerity. I must tell him that there was no single recommendation of the Firearms Consultative Committee relating to safety that was not implemented by the previous Government.

The hon. Members for Basildon (Angela Smith) and for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) also made excellent maiden speeches and were gracious about their constituencies and their predecessors.

The hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) made his retread maiden speech. I welcome the tribute that he paid to his predecessor. He was, however, highly critical of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). I am sorry, but it is nonsense to suggest that my right hon. and learned Friend did not address the public safety question in his speech.

My right hon. and learned Friend pointed out that we passed the 1997 Act, which has yet to be implemented in full. It was all about protecting the public. The measure proposed by the Government is not about public safety, it is about public opinion polls. It is not about the protection of the community, it is about political correctness.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer). In his maiden speech, he showed particular knowledge of the Commonwealth games, and the House listened raptly to what he said. The House will respect his decision to abstain in the Division tonight, and understandably so.

If I may single out one Labour Member for special praise, it must be the other northern lad like myself, the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). I congratulate him on his excellent maiden speech. He paid generous and noble tributes to his predecessors, Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman and Keith Mans. Of all the maiden speeches that I have heard over the years, I have not come across one in which a Member has spoken with such obvious affection for his constituency.

I have a particular affinity with what the hon. Gentleman said. He said that he had one feature that might possibly spoil his constituency—an animal rendering plant in Lancashire. I have the only other one in the far north of England, in Penrith. We tried to have it moved to Lancashire, to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but we were not successful.

The hon. Gentleman was extremely courageous to say in a maiden speech that he thought that his own side was going a bit too far in the Bill, and that in all conscience he would have to vote against it tonight. He will be respected on both sides of the House for taking that decision. I must tell him that, when I made my own maiden speech 14 years ago, I voted against the Government that evening on a matter relating to agriculture. The Government got their revenge because the then Minister of Agriculture, Michael Jopling, made me his PPS a few years later to shut me up. He did not entirely succeed.

We contend that the total ban proposed by the Government is unnecessary. The provisions of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 will ensure that no shooter can keep a handgun at home or carry it around in public. That is the crunch. All .22 lower calibre pistols will be banned from general circulation. The owners of such weapons will be able to keep them only in a licensed gun club which the police are satisfied meet the highest security standards. Owners will never remove their pistols from the clubs, and the police will have to be informed if guns are taken outside clubs. Even then, the guns will have to be transported by a third party approved by the police. Those controls are rigorous—many people regarded them as excessive when the 1997 legislation was passed. Their purpose was to protect the public while allowing sports men and women to continue their pastime, although in a more limited and highly controlled way.

The fact is that, under the 1997 Act, another Thomas Hamilton or Michael Ryan would not be able to roam the streets carrying legally purchased and legally held handguns and commit indiscriminate murder. The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) made that point very powerfully in his speech today—as he did in speaking against the Government in the latter part of last year and earlier this year. He has spoken with obvious sincerity on this issue for a long time, and he displays deep knowledge of his subject. He was correct to point out that the Government are obsessed with controlling legal weapons, which is distracting attention from attempts to crack down on the illegal weapons in circulation.

The House must also be grateful to the hon. Gentleman for exposing the humbug of the Labour party free vote tonight. I shall say no more about that at this stage. However, if the Minister of State tries to make great play of Labour's free vote on the legislation, we shall quote extensively from several Labour speeches. We shall point out that, although it is technically a free vote in the Lobby, there is a three-line whip on attendance for Labour Members. As the hon. Member for Stockton, North pointed out, they can read the semaphore as to how they must vote tonight.

Earlier today, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe said—as have many of our colleagues—that the 1997 Act has not yet been implemented. The Government should consider the effectiveness of that Act before blundering ahead with their costly proposals for a total ban, which are based not on hard evidence but on an erroneous assumption. The Government seem to have the misconstrued and rather woolly idea that if they ban law-abiding people from owning .22 calibre firearms, somehow evil people will be denied the means of killing the innocent. The world is just not like that.

If the Government think that they can protect the innocent from psychopaths and evil killers by banning the implements that they use to carry out their dastardly deeds, the Government will find that they must introduce new legislation every week banning another inanimate object that evil people use to commit crimes. Why will the Government not listen to the pleas of their Back Benchers? The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has spoken consistently about firearms control. Tonight, he urged the Government to think the matter through. He advised them to re-examine Lord Cullen's comments before blundering ahead with new measures before the 1997 Act is implemented fully.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): Does my right hon. Friend recall the distinguished efforts of my predecessor,

[Mr. Humfrey Malins]

Sir Cranley Onslow, on behalf of thousands of law-abiding shooters in Woking who think that last year's legislation was too hasty? Will he accept that thousands of people in the Woking and Bisley area believe that the legislation is hasty and punishes innocent sportsmen?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Sir Cranley Onslow was a noble defender of the right of innocent people to hold firearms in properly controlled, strict conditions. The Bill goes much further than that by seeking to ban firearms that are held at gun clubs under strict conditions.

Mr. Colvin: My right hon. and hon. Friends have paid tribute to Sir Cranley Onslow—and rightly so—for his efforts on behalf of gun owners and for his work as a distinguished member of the council of the National Rifle Association. Will my right hon. Friend pay tribute also to Sir Jerry Wiggin, who, in a similar role on the executive of the National Rifle Association and as head of the British Shooting Sports Council, did a great deal to make the House and the country more aware of the value of shooting?

Mr. Maclean: Of course I pay tribute to Sir Jerry Wiggin in exactly the same way. He has a long and distinguished record in defending those minority rights when properly and safely controlled.

To go forward with this draconian Bill without having clearly justified its need would be unfair and vindictive. It would kill off the Olympic sport of target pistol shooting in this country, ending for thousands of able-bodied and disabled law-abiding citizens alike a pastime that they may have enjoyed for many years. The British Paraplegic Shooting Association has said that the sport is as much a form of rehabilitation as it is a pastime for many disabled shooters. A total ban would mean that Britain would be no longer able to compete at Olympic or Commonwealth level at pistol target shooting events.

The controls under the 1997 Act are rigorous. When that measure was passing through the House, Labour Members argued that it was draconian. The controls that are available under it have not even been tried out. What is the rationale? What is the benefit that will be gained by such a draconian scheme other than a few snappy headlines and soundbites conjured up by the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson)?

We know that we are up against soundbite politics when even the new Minister for propaganda was out-soundbitten on this issue. Even when he was writing letters assuring constituents that

"people such as yourself will still be able to own hand guns, but they must be kept safely under lock and key at properly controlled centres",

the then shadow Home Secretary was reading the latest opinion poll and focus group findings, and Labour party policy changed overnight. That happened behind closed doors over mineral water in smoke-free rooms in Islington.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) has observed that Labour's evidence to the Cullen inquiry was entirely at odds with its present policy. A total ban on handguns would also be expensive. The Government have failed to come up with any real justification for the Bill and they have not said from where the money is to come, or which other commitments or projects are to suffer if the money is to be found. The Minister must come clean on that point. Warm words and rhetorical smokescreens have been the Labour party's approach to accountancy in councils throughout the land, but it will soon discover that that is no way to manage the affairs and finances of a nation.

I press the Government again to explain how and where they will find the £30 million-plus to compensate .22 pistol shooters for their weapons and accessories. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe has already said, we opted against compensation for gun clubs during the passage of what became the 1997 Act. That was legitimate and in line with long-established principles and precedents. We reached that decision because gun clubs and their members could transfer and shoot with smaller calibre pistols. They were not put entirely out of business.

The effect of the Bill, however, will be to force the great majority of gun clubs to close. A total ban will deprive clubs of the right to use their property. They will no longer be able to operate or exist as a result of legislation.

The Government must say whether they will revisit the idea of compensating clubs that will face instant closure when the Bill is enacted. I shall quote the line that was taken by the Home Secretary during a debate on what became the 1997 Act. He said that

"where individuals or businesses lose their property or property rights as a result of legislation or decisions made under legislation . . . it is entirely proper that they should be compensated for that loss."—[*Official Report*, 18 February 1997; Vol. 290, c. 804.]

With the Bill receiving its Second Reading, all those clubs that cannot convert to any other form of shooting—for example, rifle shooting—because they were purpose built as pistol clubs will lose their property rights because they will not be able to continue pistol shooting. Therefore, the principles enunciated by all Governments, and which the present Government claim that they will adhere to, mean that the question of compensation must be revisited.

The Opposition do not oppose rigorous gun control. On the contrary, we bequeathed to the Government some of the toughest restrictions on the ownership and possession of hand guns that are to be found anywhere in the world. We took action throughout our period of office when we thought it necessary, after due consideration, to tighten firearms law.

I note with interest that the Government are considering banning imitation guns. It was the previous Administration who, in 1982, brought imitation firearms within the same tight licensing scheme that applied to other forms of dangerous weapons.

We do not believe that the Government have given this matter due consideration. We do not believe either that the Government have advanced an adequate enough case to restrict the liberty of thousands of law-abiding .22 pistol shooters. Nor do we believe that there is any need for a total ban. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire said, the Bill has the taint of self-righteousness about it. I therefore commend the reasoned amendment to the House.

9.44 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Alun Michael): The speech that we have just heard was a mixture of soundbite and poetry. The right hon. Member

for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) tried his best to mount a challenge to the Government's case, but failed. If individual freedoms are being trampled on in the Bill, as the right hon. Gentleman suggested at the beginning of his speech, they were being trampled on in the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997, which he helped through the House. The difference is not one of principle. Tonight's debate is not a philosophical discussion. It is simply about whether we stick with the ban on 80 per cent. of handguns, under the present Act, or remove 100 per cent. of handguns, including the .22 pistols, which are lethal and as portable and easily hidden as the larger-calibre handguns that are banned under the Act.

If, as the right hon. Gentleman suggests, we wait until the 1997 Act has been in place for some time before considering whether to ban .22 handguns, confusion and uncertainty will prevail for the public and for shooters, and we shall in due course be faced with the second and higher cost of compensating shooters who have moved from higher-calibre handguns to .22 handguns. That will be a waste of public money. It is better for us to decide now, and to have certainty, in the interests of shooters and the public.

May I put the right hon. Gentleman right on the Labour party's evidence to the Cullen inquiry? I have it here. In paragraph 18, we stated clearly:

"In general, given the lethal nature of handguns, we see a strong case for banning them altogether."

It is as clear and simple as that. We did, of course, consider whether it was possible to protect the sport of shooting in the interests of those who had legitimately enjoyed it, but we concluded that that was not possible. That logic underlies the arguments that we have advanced over the past year, and the arguments that have led to our presenting the Bill.

We have heard a number of maiden speeches tonight, and I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that their quality has been extremely high—worryingly high, in some ways. My hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) made a strong case for the needs of his constituency in a witty and effective speech. He brought to our attention the existence of the office of agent to the parliamentary rifle club: that sounds a curious animal, which will no doubt be sought out by a variety of people.

Having himself played a part in the campaigning work of the Gun Control Network, my hon. Friend paid tribute to his wife's work in chairing that group. I am happy to endorse his tribute. Campaigners since Dunblane have been characterised by restraint and common sense, rather than the hysteria that many of us expected might break out.

My hon. Friend was right to say that the basic question is, will the Bill work? I share his view that it will, that without the removal of .22 handguns the existing law is flawed and that there is every danger that it will not work in protecting the public.

One of the most powerful speeches came from the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), a Liberal Democrat who spoke from experience as a shooter. He paid tribute to the honest way in which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary had introduced the Bill, and had responded to so many interventions. In a similar way, I pay tribute to the honesty and clarity with which the hon. Gentleman spoke. He said that he supported the Bill with heartache and sadness, and described how he had handed in his own handgun after thinking through the logic suggested by Dunblane and subsequent events. His words spoke volumes in demonstrating and representing the decency of the vast majority of shooters who will, in general, accept the law of the land—albeit with regret—when the Bill is enacted.

Some of what has been said about shooters going underground is nonsense. The hon. Gentleman spoke for the decency of people who have taken part in the sport of shooting over the years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) is clearly a new Member of great talent and generosity, as his tribute to his predecessor showed. He said that he intended to vote against the Bill, but I hope that he will reconsider. It is not necessary to maintain a constituency-specific reputation for idiosyncrasy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) arrived in the House with a distinguished record as a county councillor and, indeed, as chairman of Humberside police authority—a name which will now survive. His support for the Bill is invaluable.

It is a particular pleasure for me to welcome to the House my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) and to know that the confidence that we both showed in ending her employment as my research assistant on 1 May was well timed and completely justified. It was rather cheeky of her to get a majority of more than 13,000, but her cogent and effective speech demonstrated her powers of persuasion, and the two may not be totally unrelated.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) made a confident contribution. We hope that he will grow into a fitting successor to Members of Parliament who have previously represented that area such as Wilberforce and Cobden. I wish that I could accept his comparison between the prohibition era in the United States and today's Bill, but I think that he is wrong in that comparison. He said that madmen cannot be stopped from committing murder by getting rid of guns. No, but one can reduce their access to guns and the Bill will reduce their access to .22 pistols.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), although I disagree with his description of the Bill as distasteful. I wonder whether he would apply that description to the 1997 Act introduced by the Conservative Government. *[Interruption.]* Some hon. Members clearly would, but those hon. Members who have been absent most of the evening are even more vigorous in shouting at members of their own Front Bench than in shouting at Ministers.

I also pay tribute to the thoughtful speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer), who had a difficult job in the House tonight. I was chairman of the finance committee of Cardiff city council when it bid for the Commonwealth games, so I know the work involved and the disappointment of defeat, and I therefore share all the more in the joy that the games will be coming to Manchester. His speech demonstrated that the issue is much more complex than Conservative Members have suggested. I commend the quality of his speech and I respect his reasons for abstaining tonight. He made clear his acceptance of the commitment and undertakings given by my right hon. Friend with regard to the games.

[Mr. Alun Michael]

My hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman) rightly paid tribute to his predecessor, who was courageous and passionate in pressing for a ban on handguns. My hon. Friend's reference to his brother's experience as a policeman facing the barrel of a .22 pistol was one of the many contributions to the debate which each in themselves could be conclusive. It was a telling point.

Some contributions were less convincing. The hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) thinks that practice as a barrister provides authoritative knowledge of low life, but he was unable to produce evidence and so became petulant.

My hon. Friends the Members for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) suggested that we should allow part of a gun to be held at home and part at a club, as was referred to in Lord Cullen's recommendation. That point was considered fully during the debate on the 1997 Act and it was comprehensively dismissed. He also made the point that the loss of gun clubs would undermine police training because they would be unable to continue additional training in their own time.

The Association of Chief Police Officers and its equivalent body in Scotland were consulted in February on that point and neither suggested that loss of additional training in private time to top up police training in official time was likely to have the impact suggested. Training levels for police are not compromised by the Bill or by the 1997 Act. They are set by an ACPO joint standing committee on police use of firearms, taking advice from police firearms officers and experts in training.

The right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) made a rather odd speech in which he claimed that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had not argued that the measure is necessary and proportional to the need to protect the public. I found it odd because that is precisely what my right hon. Friend's speech was all about. It is a Government measure. We have shown leadership and clarity. We have put the safety of the public first. We challenged his Government to allow a free vote on the issue earlier this year and we have kept faith with that approach in government.

The hon. Member for Romsey (Mr. Colvin) seemed to be going through the motions in his contribution. He always looks distinguished but he made a weak and sometimes petty speech in which he tried to call in aid the European Court, which he clearly despises. Then he accused my right hon. Friend of being cynical, when he is simply being clear and honest with the House about the Bill's impact. The hon. Gentleman was against the 1997 Act, so it is hardly surprising that he opposes this Bill.

The hon. Gentleman asked why disabled shooters should be disadvantaged by the Bill. There is no attempt to disadvantage disabled shooters, but it is the considered view that the public's safety can be protected to the extent that we believe is necessary only by banning not 80 per cent. of handguns, as proposed by the Conservative party, but 100 per cent., as we propose.

It takes a talent for well-presented muddle to argue that a move from 80 per cent. to 100 per cent. is an issue of basic principle. To be frank, the case for retaining .22 guns has not been made.

Sir Nicholas Lyell *rose—*

Mr. Michael: The right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed (Mr. Beith) accepted that the 1997 Act deals with compensation in the same way as this Bill does. *[Interruption.]* I simply say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Mr. Michael: I shall give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He will be aware that .22 pistols are widely available in France and can almost be obtained over the counter. They can be brought into this country without the slightest difficulty. The Minister does not pretend that there are any controls. Given that, what is the point of imposing a blanket ban in this country?

Mr. Michael: I thought that it would not be much of a contribution. The right hon. and learned Gentleman clearly has a total lack of faith in Customs or any controls on our borders. It is untrue to say that people can wander into this country with guns. It is a problem that people do not obey the law, but that is no justification for allowing more .22 handguns to be held legally. That argument is totally illogical.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) spoke from the heart, as he always does. I acknowledge the integrity and passion with which he pursues issues such as child protection. I endorse his tribute to the late Baroness Faithfull. I respect his views, and I know that he has thought hard and long about the issues that will come to a conclusion with the Bill. He was right to say that legislation after Hungerford was flawed and not totally logical. I sincerely believe that our reasons for introducing this Bill are soundly based and logical, and will increase the protection of the public.

I shall clarify the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, North made about dates in respect of the ownership of .22 weapons, because he was wrong. Under clause 2(4), the Bill gives the date of possession as 14 May 1997, which is the date of the Queen's Speech. However, for calculating market values we have used 16 October 1996. That will benefit claimants, because the value of guns may have fallen between October 1996 and May 1997.

My hon. Friend made some powerful points, but he is wrong on a number of them. He is certainly wrong about the electoral pressure on my right hon. Friend. I was present when he met the then Home Secretary, the then Scottish Secretary and the then shadow Scottish Secretary shortly after Dunblane. I remember the determination that informed our discussion then and later to do what is right: not to be rushed or swayed by emotion, but to use the period of the Cullen inquiry to tease out the right policies

for the future. We started out hoping that we could allow the sport of handguns to continue, but we were inexorably driven to the conclusion that we could not do so.

Mr. Maclean: Before the Minister sits down, will he address the compensation point that the shadow Home Secretary and I raised?

Mr. Michael: No, I answered those points during the debate on compensation on Monday. We will not go wider than the previous Government in compensating business. It is not logical or consistent, and we will not do so.

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Mr. Michael: The right hon. and learned Gentleman and the right hon. Gentleman should make up their minds what they want to do, because there are only a few minutes left. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Michael: The shadow Home Secretary's intervention at this point is inappropriate. I have given way a number of times.

Mr. Howard *rose—*

Mr. Michael: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has tried to rewrite history—particularly his own record—by pretending that the previous Government were tough on guns.

The contrast that we have seen in the House tonight is clear. Our task of responding to the heart-rending tragedy of Dunblane will not be complete until we complete the ban on handguns that we believe is necessary for the protection of the public.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mrs. McGuire) made a powerful speech, which was all the more powerful for being calm. Her contribution was emotional only in its sincerity. In its analysis of the choice that faces us tonight it was logical and clinical, and I can assure her and my other hon. Friends who have spoken that we shall complete that task.

Several hon. Members have said that damage is done only by weapons held legally. But 400 guns a year are stolen, and, once stolen, those guns are used illegally. That, above all, is the devastating statistic that leads us to commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 173, Noes 384.

Division No. 27] **[10 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cann, Jamie
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Dawson, Hilton
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward *(Old Bexley & Sidcup)*
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Robert
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Opik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John

Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin
and
Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allan, Richard *(Sheffld Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Ballard, Mrs Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Horne Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marek, Dr John
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana

Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Jon Owen Jones.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 384, Noes 181.

Division No. 28] **[10.17 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allan, Richard *(Sheffld Hallam)*
Allen, Graham *(Nottingham N)*
Anderson, Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Ros'dale)*
Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Ms Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne *(Aberd'n S)*
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Mrs Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Robert
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond *(Kilmarnock)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Christine
Byers, Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Canavan, Dennis
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain *(Hammersmith & Fulham)*
Colman, Anthony *(Putney)*
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Ms Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Ms Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr John *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curtis–Thomas, Ms Clare
Dafis, Cynog
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Rt Hon Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Ms Janet
Denham, John
Dewar, Rt Hon Donald
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Ms Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Ms Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fearn, Ronnie
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Ms Lorna
Flint, Ms Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Ms Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael John *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Gorrie, Donald
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie
Griffiths, Ms Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John

Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Geoffrey
Hope, Philip
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampst'd)*
Jackson, Mrs Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian *(Tamworth)*
Johnson, Ms Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ms Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Ms Tessa
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Mrs Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Miss Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Tessa
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Ms Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andy
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Ms Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLeish, Henry
McMaster, Gordon
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Ms Judy
Mandelson, Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Ms Gillian
Michael, Alun
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll Bute)*
Milburn, Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Ms Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Dennis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, William *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Mrs Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Rt Hon George *(Hamilton S)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Ms Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Ms Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Ms Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Mrs Gisela *(Edgbaston)*
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swinney, John
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Welsh, Andrew
White, Brian
Whitehead, Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Dr Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wise, Audrey
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Dr Tony *(Cannock)*
Wright, Tony *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jon Owen Jones and Mr. David Clelland.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cann, Jamie
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Kensington)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colvin, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Dawson, Hilton
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward

George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodlad, Rt Hon Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton)*
Heath, Rt Hon Sir Edward *(Old Bexley & Sidcup)*
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard *(N Essex)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Robert
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Dr Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Merchant, Piers
Mitchell, Austin
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Opik, Lembit
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro & St Austell)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thompson, William
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Wardle, Charles
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Woodward, Shaun
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Patrick McLoughlin
and
Mr. Peter Ainsworth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

Bill committed to a Committee of the whole House.—[*Mr. Michael.*]

Committee Tomorrow.

FIREARMS (AMENDMENT) BILL [*MONEY*]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Firearms (Amendment) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any increase attributable to that Act in the administrative expenses payable out of money so provided under any other enactment; and

(b) any sums required by the Secretary of State for paying compensation in respect of—

(i) small-calibre pistols the possession of which becomes unlawful as a result of that Act; or

(ii) equipment designed or adapted for use in connection with small-calibre pistols.—[*Mrs. Jane Kennedy.*]

Question agreed to.

Lockerbie and Libyan Sanctions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. Jane Kennedy.]*

10.35 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Hon. Members should leave the Chamber quietly. There is an Adjournment debate, and an hon. Gentleman is attempting to address the House.

Mr. Dalyell: I refer the House to the Adjournment debate of 20 January 1992, column 153; to my initiation of a debate on the Arab world on 27 November 1992, column 1097 and the debate the following week initiated by Cyril Townsend; to the Adjournment debate of 12 April 1994, column 181; to the Adjournment debate for the summer of 20 July 1994, column 357; to the Scottish Grand Committee Adjournment debate of 13 December 1994, column 40; to the Adjournment debate of 1 February 1995, column 1056, which is the only occasion on which a Foreign Secretary—in that case, Douglas Hurd—has answered a Back-Bencher's Adjournment debate since the war; to the Scottish Grand Committee Adjournment debate of 14 June 1995, column 47; to the Adjournment debate of 29 November 1995, column 1308; to the Adjournment debate of 7 February 1996, column 443; to the Adjournment debate on WPC Yvonne Fletcher 8 May 1996, column 208; to the Adjournment debate of 24 July 1996, column 273; and to the Adjournment debate of 28 February 1997, column 598.

The previous Government's claim that the Lockerbie evidence could not be discussed for fear of jeopardising any future trial of the two Libyan accused is nonsense. When the indictments were announced in November 1991, the United States State Department gleefully released a so-called "fact sheet", which set out the evidence; and the contents of that sheet were widely reported by the press on both sides of the Atlantic and in subsequent books and television and radio programmes. Is not the real reason that the previous Government were so unwilling to discuss the evidence the fact that subsequent investigations by the media and others have found the claims in the "fact sheets" to be hugely flawed?

On the basis of the evidence that has so far come into the public domain, there are experienced members of the legal profession in Scotland—including Robert Black QC, professor of Scots law at the university of Edinburgh, and Peter Anderson of the distinguished solicitors Simpson Marwick, who represented Pan Am—who have come to the view that there is a grave risk that a trial of the two accused Libyans before a court applying Scots criminal law and procedure would collapse at the close of the case for the prosecution. That would happen as a result of the court sustaining a submission, on behalf of the accused, that there was no case for them to answer as the prosecution evidence, taken at its highest, was insufficient in law to warrant a conviction, and hence to justify further continuation of the proceedings.

Even if the Crown has evidence filed away of which we know nothing, how credible is it likely to be, and how is it likely to be treated by a court after the passage of eight and a half years? The greater the delay, the greater the damage to the Crown's case, on account of the dimming of memories and the possible death of key witnesses.

Let these issues be resolved by the setting up of an ad hoc tribunal—or, if not that, a trial conducted at The Hague, as closely as possible under Scottish rules of evidence, before a panel of judges presided over by a Scottish judge, if desired, and the case prosecuted by the Scottish Lord Advocate, if desired.

There are three main planks to the evidence. The first are documents from Frankfurt airport, which purport to show that an unaccompanied bag was transferred from an Air Malta flight to the doomed flight 103. Careful analysis by Mr. Denis Phipps, former head of security for British Airways and one of the country's foremost experts in aviation security, showed the documents to be wholly unreliable and incapable of supporting the conclusions claimed by the official Lockerbie investigation.

The second plank is the evidence of the Maltese shopkeeper Mr. Tony Gauci, who, it is claimed, recognised Abdel Basset Al Megrahi, one of the two Libyan accused, as the purchaser of the clothes that allegedly ended up wrapped around the bomb. Mr. Gauci's statements have been leaked to the media—Radio 4's "File on Four", among others—and they show categorically that he did not identify Al Megrahi, but someone much older and taller.

The third piece of evidence is the fragment of circuit board allegedly from the bomb's timing mechanism. It was traced to a Swiss company, Mebo, which, according to the fact sheets, had sold the entire batch of that type of timer to the Libyan intelligence service. Not only was the timer extremely impractical for use in an aircraft bomb, but Mr. Edwin Bollier, the head of Mebo, and his chief engineer, Mr. Ulrich Lumpart, have revealed that similar timers were also sold to the East German Stasi, which had close links to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, General Command, the original suspects in the Lockerbie bombing. Mr. Bollier has never been allowed to examine the fragment allegedly used in the bomb.

I gave my hon. Friend the Minister notice of my questions as it would be quite improper to raise such complicated issues without giving his Department notice. Is it not time to review the decision on Bollier and Lumpart? Mr. Alastair Duff, the defence lawyer of the court solicitors acting for the two suspects, asks that the Crown considers releasing to him at this stage details of the evidence against the two suspects, such as names and addresses of potential witnesses; copies of Crown productions, including forensic and other expert reports; and other relevant information, so that he can investigate the Crown case and prepare his clients' defence. Could that be done?

Is it not time to consider the role of the Central Intelligence Agency in the investigation? It provided the crucial intelligence that helped to link the timing device to Libya. During the 1980s, the agency ran one of its biggest ever covert programmes to destabilise the Gaddafi regime. One of the key players was Oliver North. Another was Vincent Cannistraro, who later headed the CIA's Lockerbie intelligence investigation. Why has Mr. Cannistraro's role not been challenged, when his previous role is a matter of undisputed fact?

Should not the Government also consider the role of the four key forensic experts in the Lockerbie cases—Dr. Thomas Hayes and Mr. Allen Feraday of the Royal Armaments Research and Development Establishment, and James T. Thurman and David Williams of the FBI? All those men have given highly dubious evidence in previous cases. Dr. Hayes was part of the forensic team who convicted the Maguire Seven, and whose misdemeanours were exposed by the May inquiry. Mr. Feraday came in for fierce criticism by the judge in the successful appeal of Mr. John Berry in September 1993. The recent investigation into the FBI forensic laboratory by the US justice department's office of the inspector general recommended that both Mr. Thurman and Mr. Williams should be removed from their positions.

What of the drug finds among the crash debris at Lockerbie? A number of witnesses found substantial quantities of drugs, including heroin, yet were warned not to speak, and the official line remained that no drugs were found. One of the witnesses confided in the Rev. John Mosey, who lost his daughter in the bombing. Mr. Mosey passed on the information to a very senior Scottish police officer at the Lockerbie fatal accident inquiry in 1991 and the officer assured him that the witness would be visited by the police. Why did that visit never take place?

In view of the fact that a youth was charged with looting from the site of the disaster, and tried and sentenced to a period of custody, would the Foreign Office care to ascertain why US officials who removed a case from the disaster site without the knowledge, permission or authorisation of the chief constable were not charged with a similar offence? Would the Foreign Office talk to Dr. David Fieldhouse, who was on the site, counted the bodies, and who—for heaven's sake—was the police surgeon, with 14 years' experience, at the time of the Bradford fire, the major disaster before Lockerbie?

On another tack, this matter is important not only because the relatives want to know the truth. Frankly, it is in our British national interest. Kevin Boyle, the chairman of the British-Libyan business group, tells me that, in a market traditionally dominated by British skill, technology and business, the relative success of our European competitors and our relative lack of success is particularly galling.

Within the limits of UN sanctions, Libya offers tremendous opportunities for British companies. The world's largest civil engineering project—the great man-made river project—is in Libya. The proposed Maghreb railway could offer UK companies possibilities even greater than those presented by the channel tunnel, and there still remain vast reserves of oil and gas yet to be fully realised.

Unless the Government's policy towards the UK's outstanding problems between Britain and Libya becomes somewhat flexible, Britain's participation in this market will shrink or, worse, simply disappear. There is already a partial ban on UK companies allowed to tender for phase three of the great man-made river project, on account of an obstructive visa policy that no other European nation implements. This fact alone has, we know, cost us at least £100 million in lost contracts in 1996. We believe that the real situation is worse.

An increasing reluctance by the Libyans to do business with UK firms, and a halt in the issuing of letters of credit, has caused severe hardship to UK firms, culminating in one company going into receivership. There are and there will be other casualties and, in most cases, it will be European firms who benefit from a British demise.

We understand that there are substantial political considerations, but surely, after eight years of sanctions, the only losers have been the ordinary Libyan people, British business, British workers and, of course, the families of the victims of the Lockerbie air disaster.

I have given notice to the Foreign Office of a matter that is not their direct responsibility. Much of the trouble may have started with the dreadful murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher, and I have sent the Foreign Office the videos made by Fulcrum Productions. If they are to be dismissed, one assumes that George Styles—the senior ballistics expert of the British Army—does not know what he is talking about on the question of the angles of bullets going into bodies.

One also assumes that Professor Thomas—a friend of mine—does not understand the physiology of what happens when bullets go into bodies; except that he was the senior consultant surgeon at the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast.

Above all, it assumes that Bernard Knight, the Home Office pathologist for 25 years, who was considered sufficiently responsible to be put in charge of the Cromwell street investigation, does not understand the pathology of what happened. All those people have said that WPC Fletcher could not have been shot from the window from which the authorities claim she was shot.

My conviction is that, within hours of Pan Am 103 shattering the Scottish countryside, the highest reaches of the American and British Governments had a pretty good idea exactly what happened. When I speak of the highest reaches, I am referring to Lawrence Eagleburger, Margaret Thatcher and Sir Charles Powell. The Americans then asked Mrs. Thatcher to play Lockerbie low key, and she did. The Lord Advocate of the day was in no position to take on the Prime Minister, least of all that Prime Minister. I trust that a Labour Government will confront the Americans and come clean—if not tonight, at least soon.

10.50 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tony Lloyd): May I say, without any intention to flatter, that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has a well-deserved reputation for personal courtesy, which is matched only by his diligence in pursuing the issues he takes up. I thank him for his courtesy in giving me notice of at least some of the issues that he raised this evening. It is important to place on record, for him and for those listening to the debate in the Chamber and more widely, his tenacity over a long period. Many people are not sure that they have received definitive answers on the issue.

I well remember when, just before Christmas 1988, the first news reports began to come in about a plane disappearing. Eventually the full scale of the tragedy that took place over Lockerbie became apparent. What happened there was an outrage perpetrated by evil people. On that, the whole House would be at one.

Even after the time that has passed, I place on record my deep sympathy for those who lost family on that night. I also pay tribute to all those who assisted in and around

[Mr. Tony Lloyd]

Lockerbie on the night of the disaster and on the days following. I am conscious that the scale of the operation, from the sensitive matter of how to deal with the deceased and their distraught relatives to the collection of the debris from the aircraft, was on a scale well beyond any disaster that we have ever experienced in this country. I recognise, too, the work done by the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary, who conducted the investigation.

I understand the frustration of the bereaved relatives, who have not only had to cope with their private loss, but whose grieving process has been made more difficult by their uncertainty about the significance of the evidence and the lack of progress. Some eight and a half years on, we seem no nearer to holding a trial of those accused of the bombing than when the Lord Advocate announced the issue of warrants against the two Libyan intelligence officers in November 1991.

It is only five and a half weeks since the Government were elected. No one can come to the issue entirely fresh, but I and my colleagues in the Foreign Office and the Scottish legal offices approach it with a freshness of mind, not with preconceived notions. We are new to the scale of the detail involved. I know that my hon. Friend understands that he is ambitious in his expectations of Ministers' capacities. We must master a difficult brief that is spread over the eight and a half years since the Lockerbie disaster.

I stress that Lockerbie is not, and cannot be, an issue of low or no priority to this Government. It is an important issue which we shall continue to visit. In the coming weeks, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and other Foreign and Commonwealth Office Ministers will give the matter the considered attention it rightly deserves, and, together with the Lord Advocate, will consider the best way of handling its international implications.

However, I underline the fact that I am not here tonight to raise expectations that this Government's views will differ from those of the last Government, because I think that it would be unfair to raise people's hopes at this stage. The Government are well aware that the Scottish petition warrants were obtained only after the most extensive criminal investigation known in this country. Evidence amassed from that investigation enabled the then Lord Advocate, Lord Fraser of Carmyllie—I take account of my hon. Friend's comments—to seek the issue of petition warrants for the arrest of the two Libyans accused.

The then Lord Advocate, together with his two successors, concluded that the evidence was sufficient to justify the obtaining of, and insistence upon, those petition warrants. I confirm that my noble and learned Friend, the present Lord Advocate, has been fully briefed about the evidence forming the factual background to the petition warrants. He is also of the view that the evidence is sufficient to justify the proceedings that have been instituted against the two Libyans accused.

My hon. Friend mentioned the fact that some people may have reservations about the sufficiency of the evidence against the two Libyans accused. Such reservations are entirely understandable when those who attempt to assess its sufficiency are not privy to the totality of that evidence. I know that this is a matter of frustration to the relatives, but the prosecuting and investigating authorities have been very careful not to disclose details of the evidence in the case while criminal proceedings are pending, because of the threat that that could present to any criminal trial of the two accused.

The Lord Advocate is the appropriate person to assess the sufficiency of this case, and, as I have said, no fewer than four Lords Advocate have assessed the case. The present Lord Advocate certainly does not fear the former Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, and he does not allow his judgment to be affected.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate also remains of the view that the Lockerbie investigation should not be regarded as closed. Anyone with any evidence relevant to the inquiry should make it available to the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary. My hon. Friend has raised several detailed points, and I do not think that it will assist him or the House if I try to respond to them tonight. I shall re-examine his points in detail, as I do not want to appear to dismiss them without examining them properly.

My hon. Friend described the delay in bringing this matter to trial as quite unacceptable. That delay has been occasioned by the Libyan authorities' failure to make the two accused available for trial in Scotland or in the United States—as required not by this country, but by the United Nations Security Council sanctions.

As long ago as September 1993, the Libyan authorities expressed their satisfaction with assurances given to them through the United Nations Secretary-General concerning the fairness of trial in Scotland. Indeed, the Libyan authorities said at the time that it would encourage the two accused to surrender themselves for trial in Scotland.

The Libyan Government should therefore arrange for the surrender of their two nationals for trial in Scotland, which is the proper manner of determining guilt or innocence in respect of any crime committed in Scotland. Like my hon. Friend, I have faith in Scottish law and in the Scottish judicial process. It is not acceptable to allow the accused to dictate the terms and circumstances of their trial.

My hon. Friend asked the Government to accept what he believes to be a genuine Libyan offer regarding trial in a third country. The question for us is whether such an offer is genuine. The Libyan position is not as clear as some might suggest. The Libyans say that they support ideas for trial in a third country, but they seem to have a number of variants in mind.

In a recent approach to the US relatives—which is the same approach that they made to the Organisation of African Unity at the recent conference in Harare—they speak of three options, to which my hon. Friend also referred in his speech. They are a trial in a third and neutral country determined by the United Nations Security Council; a trial by Scottish judges at the International Court of Justice at The Hague in accordance with Scottish law; or a trial by a special criminal tribunal at ICJ headquarters.

There are other suggestions also. However, the Libyans always fall short of giving any explicit undertaking—I hope that hon. Members are listening carefully—that they will ensure the appearance of the accused at any such trial. Indeed, they argue against trial in Scotland or the United States by saying that they are powerless to send their nationals to either country.

One factor that we shall need to consider extremely carefully is the extent to which this professed inability to surrender the accused applies equally to other countries—third countries—where we are asked to establish a court. It seems that we are being asked to rely on the good will of the accused themselves to present themselves to a court where they have said that they are prepared to stand trial. We shall need to consider carefully, and we will, what weight to attach to the chances of their actually doing this.

My hon. Friend has raised a number of points that I shall at least place on record in the form of a partial response. He referred to Mr. Vincent Cannistraro and suggested that the investigation might have been manipulated effectively by Mr. Cannistraro, formerly of the CIA. The investigation proceeded on the same basis as any other criminal inquiry—that is, by interviewing witnesses and recovering evidence, albeit on an enormous scale. The notion that all these inquiries could be manipulated in such a way that a particular result would be arrived at is fantastic. It would be a fantastic coincidence or a fantastic conspiracy.

No fewer than four Lords Advocate and four chief constables would have had to be party to such an attempt to pervert the course of justice. I must place that on record, because serious implications follow on from the view that a conspiracy could have taken place.

My hon. Friend talked about a suitcase full of drugs at Lockerbie not being fully considered. He asked specifically why the witness who recovered those drugs was not interviewed. I am advised that no significant quantities of drugs were recovered in the course of the Lockerbie investigation. Only small users' quantities of cannabis were found.

My hon. Friend asked about the possibility of evidence being released to Mr. Alastair Duff of the defence lawyers. He asked whether this would not give them the opportunity to investigate and prepare their case. I am advised that that is not possible. The Lockerbie criminal investigation has throughout been conducted in the same manner as any criminal inquiry. In any other criminal case, details of the evidence to be led in proof of the charges are given to the defence once the accused has appeared before the court. There is no reason for departing from normal practice in the Lockerbie case.

I am conscious of the fact that this is the first opportunity that I have had to answer a debate on the issue before us. My hon. Friend has asked for details, and he requires answers. I know that tonight I cannot do justice to every query that he has raised. I can say with sincerity that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, other ministerial colleagues in the Department and I have entered into the question of Lockerbie with fresh minds and no preconceived notions. There has certainly been no attempt to cover up, if that has been the allegation in the past.

I shall ensure that the issues that my hon. Friend has raised during the debate and others will be considered properly. My ministerial colleagues and I intend to be fully briefed on the matter. Not one Minister, but all concerned, should have proper knowledge, and that will be gained. We shall perhaps be in a position to answer his questions more fully.

Mr. Dalyell: May I make it clear that I would have wished to give my right hon. and hon. Friends more time to go into the complexities of the issue? The Minister will understand, however, that parliamentary life is such that it is not every day of the week that one secures an Adjournment debate. With 300 Labour Members trying to secure Adjournment debates, one must count oneself extremely lucky to get such a debate at all. Beggars cannot be choosers. I appreciate, of course, my hon. Friend's position.

Mr. Lloyd: I make no complaints about my hon. Friend using the mechanisms that Parliament gives us all as Members to pursue a case, and he has pursued the Lockerbie case for many years. I have no complaints about that. Perhaps I have the problems, however, and not him.

We have already received a number of representations from relatives in the case, along with those made by my hon. Friend. Generally, the Government have been asked to find a way to unblock the impasses with Libya, as my hon. Friend has done tonight. The motive of the relatives is to bring about the long-promised trial of the accused or to find some other way in which the evidence might be revealed, so that they might fully understand the case against the accused Libyans. I can understand that. I have tremendous personal sympathy with my hon. Friend's motives, along with those of the relatives. It would be premature, however, to say how we will address them.

I can assure my hon. Friend and the House, and all those concerned, that we shall take into consideration all the views that have been expressed to us since taking office. We shall give proper weight to those deliberations.

11.4 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): Before my hon. Friend the Minister resumes his place—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. Does the hon. Member have the permission of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) to intervene?

Mr. Dalyell: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Grant: I had not intended to intervene in the debate, but I wonder whether my hon. Friend the Minister would consider having some sort of discussions with the Libyans for him to ascertain their position? He has stated that the Libyans were putting forward a number of proposals. I think that he said that the Libyans had three positions. I think that it is incumbent on my hon. Friend not to accept the propaganda that has gone on in the past but to speak to the Libyans, either through an intermediary or someone else, so that he can at least ascertain—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 12 June 1997

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

Windfall Tax

1. **Mr. Prior:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the representations he has received from business leaders regarding the windfall tax. [1585]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Companies have been invited to make representations. While I intend to follow the normal procedure of treating such representations as I would others for the Budget—namely, as confidential between the parties—if companies wish to make their views public, that is a matter for them.

Mr. Prior: Will my right hon. Friend—*[Interruption.]* Will the Chancellor confirm that in principle he is not in favour of retrospective taxation and that the one-off windfall tax is, indeed, one off?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful for the welcome that I received from the right hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Right hon.?"] The hon. Gentleman raises the issue of the windfall levy and asks whether I support retrospective action. That is a question that he should ask of his colleagues who were in the House in the 1980s. Was not the first windfall levy imposed by a Conservative Government without ever being in a Conservative manifesto and without any advance consultation with the businesses affected? That windfall tax was imposed on the banks to deal with the costs of failure. We are imposing a windfall tax so that we can tackle a problem that the hon. Gentleman and other Conservative Members should be concerned about. Indeed, they should be ashamed that the previous Government did not act to tackle youth and long-term unemployment.

Mr. Stevenson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with the notable exceptions of Sir Iain Vallance from British Telecom and Conservative Members, there is tremendous public support for the windfall tax throughout the length and breadth of the country? Will my right hon. Friend therefore undertake to introduce the windfall tax at the earliest possible opportunity so that we can begin to get our young people back to work?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The greatest opponents of the windfall tax are not the utilities, but the Conservative party. When a report today states that 500,000 long-term unemployed people in our country need proper skills and training to allow them to get back to work, people will be asking why the Conservative party is defending the utilities instead of the long-term unemployed.

A chairman of one of the utilities has reported that he regards the way in which we are going about the matter as reasonable and fair. Mr. James Rogers, co-owner of Midland Electricity, said only a few weeks ago that he was confident that Labour would apply the tax in a "fair and reasonable manner". He said:

"a windfall tax would require us to deal with the sins of those before us. A one-off tax is not inconsistent with that."

Minimum Wage

2. **Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact of a national minimum wage on the cost of public sector pay. [1586]

Mr. Gordon Brown: A minimum wage is in principle both fair and efficient. The impact of the minimum wage on public sector pay will depend on the level at which it is set. That is a matter for the Government to decide, when we have the advice of the Low Pay Commission, taking into account the wider effects on the economy.

Miss Kirkbride: Will the Chancellor confirm figures given by the Foreign Secretary, when he was shadow Secretary of State for Health, that a minimum wage of £4 per hour would cost the National Health Service an extra £500 million a year?

Mr. Brown: First, I welcome the hon. Lady to the House. She was a distinguished parliamentary correspondent and is now a Member of Parliament, having moved from a larger Conservative institution—*The Daily Telegraph*—to a smaller one, the parliamentary Conservative party.

The claim about the minimum wage was made repeatedly by the Conservative party throughout the general election campaign. There is no evidence for the statement other than the accusation made by the former Secretary of State for Health, who has continually suggested this. Given the traditions of Winston Churchill, Harold Macmillan and the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) in supporting a minimum wage, it ill befits the Conservative party to deprive the people currently being exploited in the labour market of the dignity of a minimum wage. I believe that both sides of the House should accept the principle of a minimum wage. The application of it will be a matter for the Low Pay Commission, on which business—including small business—is represented. It is about time the Conservative party joined the modern world.

Mr. Skinner: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is a popular demand throughout the country for a national minimum wage, which was best exemplified in the mandate that we received at the general election? On several occasions, my right hon. Friend and others on the Front Bench have said that they will consult, among others, people in the business fraternity. As several trade

unions have now passed resolutions for a minimum wage of £4 and over, including Unison at £4.42 yesterday, will my right hon. Friend guarantee that he will pay some attention not only to those in the business community but to the real wealth creators—the workers?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for supporting the principle of a minimum wage. *[Interruption.]* I should have thought that Conservative Members would be listening to the electorate more by supporting the case for a minimum wage—*[Interruption.]*—than by defending huge salary rises in the privatised utilities. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must stop shouting.

Mr. Brown: The Opposition have learnt nothing from the past few weeks.

The specifics of the minimum wage will be dealt with by the Low Pay Commission, which will receive representations. Business and employees are represented on it, and small businesses are specifically guaranteed representation on it. That is the right way to set a minimum wage. I may also tell the Opposition that the experience in America is that a minimum wage is not only fair and efficient but helps to create jobs.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Chancellor was very courteous to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride), but he quite deliberately avoided the point of her question. Will he accept that, unless the minimum wage is set at a level at which it makes absolutely no difference to any public sector pay, it will affect the cost of public services? If he sticks to his commitment not to raise public spending, the national health service and others will face a choice between cutting services or cutting jobs. Faced with the minimum wage, they will be able to do nothing else.

Mr. Brown: All those questions will be taken into account in setting the minimum wage. I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman, who is trying to re-establish "one nation" traditions in the Conservative party, that his predecessors as shadow Chancellors and as leaders supported the principle of a minimum wage, and until the 1980s there was all-party consensus about the need for wage protection through wages councils.

As for public sector costs, the Government are having to pay out huge sums in family credit to cover wage levels—set by employers—which are lower than they should be, instead of helping, as we should, people who are in poverty. The costs of family credit are escalating as a result of there not being a minimum wage and because employers are able to set wages lower than they should. It is about time that Conservatives started to show concern about the thousands of people earning £2 or less per hour and in some cases less than £1.50 per hour. The Conservative party had better soon restore its belief in "one nation" Conservatism.

Bank of England

3. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what liaison arrangements he proposes between the Treasury and the Bank of England to ensure effective management of demand to ensure the attainment of the Government's commitment to growth. [1587]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Government's central objectives are high and stable levels of growth and employment. Price stability is an essential foundation and the Government have introduced radical reforms to monetary policy arrangements to achieve this. It is the Government who set the objectives by setting the inflation target, and the Treasury and the Bank of England will continue to have regular liaison at all levels.

Mr. Mitchell: As the Bank of England's highest wisdom in any situation is to put up interest rates—it has already done so, despite the fact that real interest rates are at a record level and the pound is substantially overvalued—is not the Bank preparing the way for a manufacturing contraction, a rise in unemployment and a fall in growth next year? If we are to have an independent central bank, should not the Government at least appoint an expansionist Governor, and is the Minister aware that the shadow Chancellor might well be available for the job next week?

Mr. Darling: I think that the shadow Chancellor has another job in mind and would not want to rule himself out of that at this stage. My hon. Friend will accept that, if we are to achieve long-term sustainable growth, we must have low inflation and stability—something that Britain has not had for many years. We must avoid the situation that we have experienced in the past 18 years, when the Conservative Government delivered two of the deepest recessions since the war. If businesses and individuals are to be able to plan in the long term, we must have stability. My hon. Friend will have noticed that long-term interest rates have fallen since my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's announcement three or four weeks ago.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Why does the Chancellor think it wise to separate the management of fiscal and monetary policy? Is it that he rejects the advice of John Maynard Keynes and is embracing the policies of Philip Snowden?

Mr. Darling: No. My right hon. Friend made it clear why we have taken the decision to give the Bank greater operational autonomy. We believe that it is important that interest rates are struck with a view to the long term. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who has been in the House—and in politics indirectly—for a long time, will agree that when Britain's performance is compared with equivalent competitor countries, our record for stability is not so good as it should be. We believe that the steps that we have taken to give the Bank of England greater operational autonomy in support of the Government's economic policy—an important point, as my right hon. Friend has made clear—are the way to achieve the stability that most people agree is essential.

Monetary Policy

4. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that the Government's monetary policy objectives are met. [1588]

5. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that the Government's monetary policy objectives are met. [1589]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Last month I announced reforms which gave the Bank of England operational responsibility for setting interest rates. Today I have written to the Governor setting out the Bank's remit and how it will be held accountable for meeting its target.

To meet the Government's objectives of high levels of growth and employment, we need consistently low inflation. That is why I am today announcing a precise and rigorous framework to achieve the Government's inflation target of 2.5 per cent.

Our new long-term framework will ensure that, if inflation is 1 per cent. higher or lower than that target, an open letter will be sent by the Governor to the Chancellor so that the public are fully informed as to why the divergence has occurred and what steps will be taken in response. I have arranged to put the letter in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Campbell: The whole country will welcome the openness and firmness of my right hon. Friend's pursuit of the Government's objectives. Does he agree that such measures are essential if we are to create a climate of stability and confidence and break out of the cycle of boom-bust economics that was the Conservative Government's policy?

Mr. Brown: If we are to achieve our aims of high levels of growth and employment in the British economy and avoid the boom-bust economics that bedevilled people's lives during the period of Conservative Government, we need to set a target for consistently low inflation. The Conservative Government's inflation target was not met in any month in 1985 or 1986; average inflation under the Conservatives was 6.2 per cent. and in the 1990s it was 4 per cent. By setting our target of 2.5 per cent. and introducing the modern procedure whereby the Governor will write to the Chancellor if it is exceeded by more than 1 per cent., we are creating the most open and rigorous framework for monetary policy.

Mr. Sutcliffe: In 1979, manufacturing represented 30 per cent. of gross domestic product, but that is now down to less than 20 per cent. and thousands of jobs have been lost. This country is a net exporter of investment. What do the Government intend to do to improve the situation?

Mr. Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend. The reason why we have had, on average, high inflation and low growth over many years is lack of investment and lack of capacity in the economy. There is no long-run trade-off between inflation and growth. We need measures that will create a platform of stability on which industry and employees can build. It is precisely for those reasons that we have set in place a long-term framework for monetary policy. If the Conservative party does not believe that I am right to make these reforms in the Bank of England, will it pledge to reverse them in its manifesto at the next election?

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: Does the Chancellor acknowledge that what he has just told the House and explained to the Governor of the Bank of England is a clear departure from the Labour party's manifesto commitment? Under the heading "No risks with inflation", it said:

> "We will match the current target for low and stable inflation of 2.5 per cent. or less."

By having a fixed 2.5 per cent. with, in effect, a margin of 1 per cent. either way, the Chancellor is setting a range of 1.5 per cent. to 3.5 per cent. Is that not the beginning of a serious relaxation of the commitment to bear down on inflation?

Mr. Brown: I have tightened the framework and made the procedure more rigorous and open. Under the Conservative Government, the range was 1 per cent. to 4.5 per cent. Under this Government, if inflation goes above 3.5 per cent., the Governor of the Bank of England will write a letter to the Chancellor explaining his views and whether the circumstances are unique. If they are repeated over a period of time, he will write again three months later.

Taken together, the reforms in the Bank of England, the setting up of the Monetary Policy Committee, the appointments that I have made to that committee, which have been widely welcomed, and this new open procedure will be welcomed in Britain and abroad. They are the best guarantee that we shall have the consistently low inflation that has eluded this country. That is the platform on which to build in order to achieve what everyone wants—high and stable levels of growth and employment.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) is right. The Chancellor has just tried to slip in an important announcement on a day when the figures show that the Conservative Government hit the inflation target of 2.5 per cent. on the button as a result of our policies. How can the right hon. Gentleman deny that he is loosening the inflation target by moving from 2.5 per cent. or less to 2.5 per cent.? He has now introduced a new obligation on the Bank of England: he will hold it accountable if inflation is more than 1 per cent. below 2.5 per cent.

Those measures loosen the criteria for controlling inflation that the bank previously used. What is the reason for that? Is it a reaction to our criticism that the Chancellor's hasty decision to go to operational independence would lead to overkill? Does it not show that he is making policy on the hoof, and giving no stability or confidence to anyone?

Mr. Brown: It is interesting to note the right hon. and learned Gentleman's nostalgia for the old Ken and Eddie show. Instead of an ad hoc, personalised and often chaotic system, we have introduced rules based on principles and a rigorous approach. One week the shadow Chancellor argues that our approach is too rigorous, and the next he says that it is too soft. The difference between the Conservative party and the Labour party is that the

Conservative party met its inflation target in only 11 months out of 55. It did not meet its target at all in 1985 and 1986. Everyone knows that the only reason why the target was met last month was because of the fall in the exchange rate. We have established a framework that is open and will last. I believe that that is our best long-term chance of having consistently low inflation, and is the means by which to achieve high levels of growth and employment.

Private Finance Initiative

6. **Ms Mountford:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what new measures he is proposing to improve the private finance initiative. [1590]

The Paymaster General (Mr. Geoffrey Robinson): I immediately moved to ask Mr. Malcolm Bates to carry out a complete review of the private finance initiative process with a view to streamlining it, and I abolished the requirement for universal testing which gunged up the process under the Tories.

Ms Mountford: I welcome my hon. Friend's encouraging reply. Is he aware that the Conservative Government spent £30 million on consultants' fees, yet not one PFI hospital was built? Does he agree that the private finance initiative process is in urgent need of improvement?

Mr. Robinson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and we are giving it that improvement. I am pleased to say that the legislation that we have introduced to enable NHS trusts to become involved in PFI projects is making good progress in another place—or will do next week. I am also pleased to say that, immediately after Question Time, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will introduce a Bill to enable local government to enter into positive public-private sector partnerships for the benefit of the country.

Mr. Dafis: Will the Minister assure us that PFI companies will never have any responsibility for the hiring and firing of teachers, the provision of books and equipment and the delivery of the curriculum? Will he give a categorical assurance that those responsibilities will remain with local education authorities, schools and governors, where they belong?

Mr. Robinson: I can give the hon. Gentleman a categorical assurance that none of those aspects features in any of the proposals for private sector investment in education that I have seen; nor would they be approved by me.

Mr. Derek Foster: Was not the former Chancellor guilty of extraordinary political incompetence, in that he screwed up the whole PFI process over a three-year period? Is it not now crucial for my hon. Friend to cut through the swathe of bureaucracy and put bulldozers on sites, particularly the site of Bishop Auckland hospital in my constituency?

Mr. Robinson: As my right hon. Friend will appreciate, I cannot give any undertaking in relation to the Bishop Auckland health trust, but I assure him that we are moving to cut through the swathes of bureaucracy, as he so aptly describes them. I can tell him that the measures that we have taken via the review—such as getting rid of universal testing—and the legislation that we have introduced have done more to encourage the PFI in five weeks than the Tories did in five years.

Mr. Jack: I welcome the Paymaster General to his post. Can he confirm that purchasing services with the maximum risk transfer will remain the key objective for the private finance initiative? Can he also confirm that financial reporting standard FRS5 and standard of accounting practice SAP21 will remain the standards by which the viability of the PFI is judged?

Mr. Robinson: There the Opposition go again, getting bogged down in a whole lot of details and losing sight—*[Interruption.]* That is precisely why their bureaucratic, pettifogging approach has delivered no PFI deals on hospitals or local government. The right hon. Gentleman ought to be ashamed of his record.

Mr. McAllion: Elsewhere in Europe, public investment which creates a tangible public asset does not count against the public sector borrowing requirement total. Will my hon. Friend therefore consider bringing Britain into step with the rest of Europe by changing to that form of public accounting? Will he bear it in mind that, as the markets already acquiesce in it throughout Europe, there is no reason to suppose that they would not acquiesce in this country as well? An added advantage would be that Scottish local authorities could raise private money to invest in remedying the housing crisis which afflicts so many people in my country.

Mr. Robinson: I hear what my hon. Friend says. We shall, of course, consider those matters, but it would be wrong for my hon. Friend to think that we had any immediate proposals for change.

Windfall Tax

7. **Mr. Keith Simpson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the companies that will be liable for the windfall tax. [1591]

10. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what time span he will use to assess the excess profits on which he plans to levy a windfall tax. [1595]

17. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer over what time scale he will calculate the excess profits for the windfall tax. [1602]

20. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what measure of profits he will base his windfall tax. [1605]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I will announce details of the windfall levy in the forthcoming Budget.

Mr. Simpson: I am obliged to the Chancellor for that highly detailed answer.

Opposition Members would like some detailed information. May I return the Chancellor to the question of the windfall tax? Will he please confirm—yes or no—that it will be a one-off payment made in one year, and made only once?

Mr. Brown: Yes.

Mr. Nicholls: Despite what the Chancellor has said about the details being released in the Budget, he is surely aware that the Prime Minister admitted in the House yesterday that he knew which companies would be liable for the windfall tax. Bearing that in mind, will the Chancellor now say whether British Telecom is included? If it is included, will the right hon. Gentleman say in what years—if any—he regards British Telecom as having made an unfair and excessive profit as a return on capital?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman ought to be patient and wait until the Budget statement. I should remind him that, when the Conservatives introduced their windfall levy on the banks, they did not even announce the names of the companies in the Budget statement. Of course, the information will become available at the time of the Budget.

The hon. Gentleman asks about excess profits. The report of the Public Accounts Committee, which appeared in March just before the general election and was signed by many Conservative Members, states:

"We note that in the five years after privatisation the water companies made profits totalling £7.4 billion, and the regional electricity companies profits of £8.7 billion, and that in both cases the profits were in excess of the level that the respective Directors General had judged it reasonable to allow for in the future."

That report to the House was signed by hon. Members in all parts of the House.

Mr. Swayne: Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House how he intends to raise a windfall tax from owners of capital who have passed their ownership to subsequent shareholders since the industries were privatised?

Mr. Brown: Unlike the Conservatives' windfall tax on the banks, we have made our determination to have the windfall levy known, not just for one or two years but over the past five years. People have been aware over that time of our intention to legislate in this way. Given what happened at the general election, I should have thought that Conservative Members would be better spending their time advancing the cause of the young and the long-term unemployed who will benefit from the measure than defending the excesses of the privatised utilities.

Mr. Lansley: As the Chancellor is proposing a one-off levy, how can he fund a continuing public expenditure requirement on welfare-to-work? His sums simply do not add up.

Mr. Brown: The one-off levy is to raise money for the Parliament; I made that clear before and during the general election campaign and I make it clear again. I know that the Conservative party is obsessively interested in the needs of the privatised utilities, but it is about time that Conservatives got interested in the needs of the young unemployed.

Mr. Sheldon: Is my right hon. Friend aware that, when he quoted from the report of the Public Accounts Committee, he could have gone much further? In a series of reports since 1983, the Committee has shown that each of the utilities was sold at a price which was less than could or should have been obtained. Is he further aware that these matters can be looked at clearly in the reports of the PAC and that they show that the windfall tax is entirely due to the previous Government's actions?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who has been Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee for a long time. The report of March 1997, which deserves wide publicity, stated:

"the replacement values of the assets of the water and sewerage companies are now estimated to be £138 billion, . . . sale proceeds were . . . £3.6 billion . . . we and our predecessors expressed concern that the shares in the companies have been underpriced."

If Conservative Members are not interested in the reports of the Public Accounts Committee, which are signed by Conservative Members, perhaps we should also look at the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, which was published only a few days before the PAC report and refers to the dramatic profit increases of privatised utilities. It is about time the Conservative party came to terms with the fact that excess profits were made which were not justifiable, and that action in the public interest should now be taken.

Ms Hewitt: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as there are now 1 million fewer jobs than when the Leader of the Opposition first became Prime Minister, it is essential to introduce a windfall profits tax and use the revenue to help move 250,000 young people off welfare and into work?

Mr. Brown: As a result of Labour's windfall levy proposals, there are fewer jobs in the House for Conservative Members as well. I direct the House's attention to this morning's report which states that half a million of our young and long-term unemployed are without the basic training skills necessary for them to get jobs. It is a scandal that, over the past 18 years, when the Conservative party could have taken action, it failed to do so. This Government will take action to help both the young and the long-term unemployed.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, instead of the Opposition display of heart bleeding for the privatisation fat cats, it would be better to ask my right hon. Friend to list the constituencies in which young people who have long been out of work will benefit? Mine is one such constituency in which people are looking forward to the results of this action.

Mr. Brown: I agree entirely. In some constituencies, 30 per cent. of working-age households or families have no one earning a wage. They include young people, the long-term unemployed and single-parent families. It is

again a scandal that, on average in Britain, 20 per cent. of working-age families have no one in work. That situation should not be sustained on social or moral grounds, and it is bad for the economy. We are determined to take the action that the Conservatives have failed to take over the past 18 years.

Mr. MacShane: I invite my right hon. Friend to ignore the bleatings of those on the Conservative Benches, the friends of the fat cats, and pay attention to Yorkshire. Is he aware of the anger there at the profits made by those privatised monopolies? People want that tax to be used to create jobs, and there will be considerable anger if there is any diminution of the well-flagged intention of the Labour party, now in government, to use the tax fairly and justly.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. When the country finds out that some of these water companies, despite six or seven years of privatisation and record profits, have paid not a penny in mainstream corporation tax, it will be annoyed. Ordinary men and women are paying 23p or 40p in the pound when many water companies have paid absolutely nothing. That is another reason why the action that we have had to take to help to tackle the problem of unemployment, because of the failure of the Conservative party, is both necessary and urgent.

Mr. William Ross: Given that the programme on which the Chancellor is going to expend this money is unlikely to be completed in the time scale that the windfall taxation is available, how does he intend to fund that expenditure in future years?

Mr. Brown: The one-off levy will be raised in the Budget and for a Parliament. The action that we take over the next few years will bring down unemployment, save on social security costs, and enable us to reduce social security bills so that we can meet our long-term objective, which is to transfer resources from social security and welfare to education and training. I want every young person to have the chance of proper training and education after the age of 16, so that we can have a nation at work, instead of many thousands of people on the dole.

VAT (Domestic Fuel)

8. **Mrs. Organ:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy towards value added tax on domestic fuel. [1593]

12. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reduce VAT on domestic fuel. [1597]

14. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what recent representations he has received on the level of VAT on fuel. [1599]

16. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to reduce VAT on domestic fuel. [1601]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have a manifesto commitment to cut VAT on domestic fuel and power to 5 per cent., and we intend to keep that pledge.

Mrs. Organ: That is very good news. I am pleased to hear it. Members of the Lydney and district area pensioner forum will be particularly delighted with that excellent news. Does my hon. Friend remember the former Prime Minister making a pledge, before the 1992 election, that he would not put VAT on fuel? Does she also remember that, after the 1992 election, the Conservative party immediately broke that pledge and imposed VAT on fuel at 8 per cent? Will she confirm whether the Labour party will keep its election pledge on VAT? *[Laughter.]*

Dawn Primarolo: Madam Deputy Speaker—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Madam Speaker, my apologies. I assume that Opposition Members are shocked at my hon. Friend's suggestion that a Government should keep their election pledge. As she has said, the previous Government gave pledges and broke them. Our pledge will be kept and pensioner households will be the better for it, and warmer in winter.

Mr. Cunningham: Is my hon. Friend aware that many pensioners regard the reduction of VAT on fuel as important, given that they have been neglected for the past 18 years?

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's promise to reduce VAT on fuel, particularly for pensioners, demonstrates clearly that we are committed to a fairness agenda and to assisting pensioners. Instead of sniggering at the questions, perhaps Opposition Members would consider assisting the Government in meeting that target.

Mr. Twigg: Does my hon. Friend recall the statement made by the former Chancellor before the last election in which he said that the challenge was to increase VAT on fuel to 17.5 per cent? Is my hon. Friend aware that that statement is of particular interest to my constituents who would pay significantly more for fuel under Conservative policies?

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend is correct to remind the House that the Conservative Government imposed VAT on fuel and that the former Chancellor said that he was committed to raising VAT on fuel to 17.5 per cent. The Opposition should now withdraw that commitment and support our target of reducing VAT to 5 per cent.

Mr. Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that, if the Conservative Government had not shamelessly broken their promises on VAT after the 1992 election, there might be a few more than 164 Conservative Members now?

Dawn Primarolo: Yes, I do agree. However, I believe that, even without that broken promise, there would be so few of them now as to put us in government.

Mr. Evans: Does the Minister agree that, when VAT on domestic fuel is reduced from 8 to 5 per cent., prices should come down? Does she agree also that, when the windfall tax on utilities is introduced, if any charge is passed on to consumers, prices from those utilities—particularly from the energy companies—will increase? Will the Minister give a guarantee that gas and electricity prices will not increase when the windfall tax is introduced? If she cannot do that, pensioners will be no better off, and Labour's election pledges will be revealed as a big con.

Dawn Primarolo: That is rich coming from an hon. Member who voted to impose VAT on fuel in the first

place. He did not care then whether extra charges would be passed on to pensioners and the low-paid. I assure him that a cut in VAT on fuel will mean a reduction in fuel prices for pensioners, the low-paid and everyone else.

Mr. Evans: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. In view of the unsatisfactory nature of that answer, I give notice that I intend to raise the matter on the Adjournment.

Madam Speaker: It was not the hon. Gentleman's question, so he cannot make that point.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does the Financial Secretary recall that, on 27 March last year in this place, she supported a reduction in the rate of VAT on energy-saving materials, describing it as a matter of justice, jobs and democracy? Does she still support that policy?

Dawn Primarolo: Under the Finance Act 1997, a review is being conducted—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] The review is being conducted as a result of a Labour amendment to the legislation. We intend to pursue that review vigorously and report to the House. This Government keep their promises: the Conservatives did not.

Mr. Edward Davey: Can the hon. Lady confirm that the cut in VAT will benefit the poorest and the wealthiest in the land? What proposals does she have to target benefits on the real poorest in order to combat and cut fuel poverty?

Dawn Primarolo: The average household will benefit by £4.50 a quarter, and the poorest will benefit by even more as a proportion of their income. It is quite clear that our method is the most effective way of delivering that reduction. I impress upon the hon. Gentleman the fact that our commitment through the environmental task force and our strategy on energy efficiency will assist those households further and deliver real benefits to them instead of pious promises.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the hon. Lady remember back to 23 January 1995, when my party's amendment aimed at reducing VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent. was described as a cynical ploy no fewer than three times by the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling)? It was stated that there was never any chance of reducing VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent. What has happened to change the Minister's mind? What realistic promise is she now holding out? We do not want to take a cynical attitude—we want to be convinced that there will be genuine reductions.

Dawn Primarolo: There was a cynical ploy, which put at risk the reduction to 8 per cent. that we had already secured on the Floor of the House, thereby stopping the Conservative Government pushing ahead with a rise in VAT to 17.5 per cent.

The hon. Lady asked a rather convoluted question. My answer to her is that the difference is that Labour is now in government and we shall deliver our promises.

City Regulation

9. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about his proposed reforms to City regulation. [1594]

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's announcement regarding reforming the regulatory system has been widely welcomed. It was the result of some four years' work and wide consultation. I am pleased to report that work is well in hand to take the Government's plans forward.

Mr. Purchase: Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should condemn the previous dilatory authority that allowed Andrew Regan to be considered a fit person to run a bank, when only a few days later he was condemned by a High Court judge as being unfit and "clearly dishonest" in his dealings with the Co-operative Wholesale Society? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that it is time that there was a new authority that will ensure that people who want to run their businesses properly and decently can do so free from the influence of crooks?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend will appreciate that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the case of Andrew Regan, as I believe that it is now sub judice. On his general point, for many years there has been concern that the regulatory system has not been capable of cleaning up those parts of the industry that needed to be cleaned up. People who were guilty of quite serious misdemeanours—which reflected badly on the industry as a whole—were not properly dealt with.

Part of the objective in streamlining the structure and the nature of the regulatory system is to ensure that, where there are problems—for example, insider dealing—they can be dealt with quickly and effectively. That is why our proposals have been widely welcomed. For years, people could not understand why the Conservative Government would not act to clean up the City. The vast majority of people in the City are honest and their integrity is beyond reproach. It was they, as much as anyone else, who wanted action to be taken. Once again, this is an example of the Labour Government acting in an area where the Conservative Government did nothing for 18 years.

Departmental Expenditure

11. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will next announce changes to departmental public expenditure totals. [1596]

Mr. Darling: I explained to the House yesterday our policy regarding the comprehensive spending review. I also explained that, during the general election campaign and since, we have made it clear that Departments are expected to work within their departmental totals.

Mr. Hughes: Following yesterday's statement, I want to ask a question for the purpose of absolute clarification. If, for example, the Social Security Department and the Minister for Welfare Reform find savings in the social security budget and the Government bring down the social security bill between now and April of the year after next—as everybody hopes that they will—and if, in the

same period, the demand for the health service rises and the obvious cost of running the service is more than the figure that the Tory Government set—a figure to which the Labour Government are adhering—will there be any chance of money being transferred from a reduced social security demand to a clearly increased demand for the health service?

Mr. Darling: Unlike the Liberal party, this party and this Government have been very clear that, before we allocate and spend money, we must know where it will come from. The whole purpose of the comprehensive spending review process, which is now under way, is that my right hon. Friends examine their budgets and determine how they can be better spent. As I explained yesterday, we have already started the process in the health service and in education, and we intend to continue the process.

Mr. Canavan: If the Barnett formula is to be reviewed, will the Chief Secretary assure the House that any amended formula will ensure that public expenditure is distributed to the different parts of the United Kingdom on the basis not only of population but of genuine need, and that any additional revenue raised by the Scottish Parliament will be available for additional expenditure within Scotland?

Mr. Darling: As I told my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) yesterday, the Government will make our proposals on funding the Scottish Parliament in a White Paper, which will be published in time for the referendum campaign and the referendum itself. We have always made it clear that it is important that all parts of the United Kingdom should be funded on the basis of need and in an acceptable manner. That is our intention, and there are no difficulties about it. My hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan) will see our proposals in the White Paper, and I am sure that he will think that they are very satisfactory.

Sir Norman Fowler: In spite of that review, will the Chief Secretary confirm that the current arrangements for exemptions from paying prescription charges will remain unchanged?

Mr. Darling: I am interested in the right hon. Gentleman's sympathy for those in need, because the House will remember the review that he conducted in the 1980s. I made it absolutely clear yesterday that all aspects of Government expenditure must be reviewed; there is no question about that. As he will well know, to exclude any part of expenditure would mean that the review cannot be effective. Conservative Members should remember that, unlike them, the Labour party is committed not only to the principles underpinning the national health service but to fairness—which is something that the Conservative party cannot even begin to understand.

Mr. Tipping: Will the Chief Secretary ensure that any review of departmental spending is collective and that there is a careful analysis of issues that are dealt with by more than one Department? If he does so, will there not be a real opportunity of ensuring that hard issues—such as poverty, adding value to people and helping communities to aspire to a new future—have a chance of being successfully addressed?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is quite right. It is absolutely essential that the Government examine the entire range of services, not least health services, for which we are responsible. There is, for example, a relationship between poverty and health and between quality of primary care and subsequent need for hospital acute care. I can assure my hon. Friend not only that will there be reviews across Departments but that the entire process will be reviewed by the Public Expenditure Committee. I am sure that he will be pleased to know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I will supervise that process.

Special Advisers

13. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy on the appointment of special advisers to Her Majesty's Treasury. [1598]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The Government's policy on the appointment of special advisers was agreed by the Prime Minister, on 19 May, in the attachment to his letter to Cabinet colleagues. A copy of that letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Colvin: I thank the hon. Lady for that reply. Will she acknowledge two matters that should make the Chancellor's job rather easier? First, he has inherited a booming economy from the outgoing Conservative Government. Secondly, he has relinquished one of his principal responsibilities—deciding monetary policy—to the Bank of England. Why is it therefore necessary for him to increase the number of his special advisers by one third?

Mrs. Liddell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point, because the reality is that we have found UK public expenditure to be a mess. The state of public expenditure prompted yesterday's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. Moreover, I detect a whiff of hypocrisy in the position adopted by Conservative Members on special advisers. Since 1974, special advisers have been serving well the United Kingdom and Governments from both parties.

As for changes in monetary policy, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his statement of 20 May, made it quite clear that changes in setting the inflation level are related to achieving the Government's other targets—to ensure that we have the right parameters, a stable economy, economic growth and fairness. Ensuring that we have a Government who govern for the many and not for the few is our priority.

Mr. Clapham: Will the my hon. Friend the Minister ensure that the special advisers to the Treasury read the study recently completed by Sheffield university's energy study group, which shows that there is a need for a change in the tax regime in the United Kingdom continental shelf? The study also shows that had we, for example, been matching the Norwegian system, the revenue

per barrel between 1984 and 1995 would have been an additional £5.5 billion. As we move to a second hydrocarbon boom—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is miles off the point. We are dealing with the appointment of special advisers. I believe that Mr. Radice wished to ask a question.

Mr. Radice: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is sheer humbug to talk about politicising the civil service when a few additional special advisers are appointed and when in fact it was Mrs. Thatcher, when she was at No. 10, who suborned the integrity of career civil servants by making them her political playthings—so much so that they were not accepted back into the civil service?

Mrs. Liddell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point, because there is clear evidence of humbug among the Opposition. Indeed, I well recall that, under the previous Government, it took the intervention of the Cabinet Secretary to ensure that the then Secretary of State for Scotland did not use the Government press office to disseminate Conservative party propaganda. The appointment of special advisers is specifically to guarantee that the civil service does not become involved in party political issues.

Mr. Green: The hon. Lady talks about humbug in relation to the politicisation of the civil service. Will she comment on reports that the Prime Minister has offered Mrs. Rachel Lomax, a career civil servant, the job of a special adviser as head of his policy unit? Will she further comment on the fact that the lady concerned, who is an intelligent civil servant, has very sensibly turned down the job because she does not want to be tainted by it?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman is indulging in speculation. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's policy unit is a matter for him but, in the few weeks that we have been in government, we have had reason to believe that the civil servants serving the Government are all intelligent, and we have every confidence in them.

Give As You Earn

15. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to raise the annual sum of money an employed person may donate to charities by way of the give-as-you-earn scheme; and what has been the cost of the scheme to public funds since its inception. [1600]

Dawn Primarolo: The payroll giving scheme has cost more than £30 million. The limit for donations under the scheme is a matter for the Chancellor in his Budget.

Dr. Godman: The upper limit of £1,200 per annum was set some time ago. Does my hon. Friend agree that it should be raised to, say, £2,000 per annum, as donors and charities would welcome such an increase and the latter would be able to plan their projects systematically? Incidentally, has my hon. Friend any idea how many hon. Members pay the maximum £1,200 per annum?

Dawn Primarolo: I do not have any idea how many hon. Members are contributing the maximum. There are more than 10 million people in pay-as-you-earn schemes who could give to charities. It is up to the charities to ensure that those people are donating. Any increase in the allowance is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in his Budget.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does the Minister share my concern about the funding of charities? If so, will she urge the Chancellor of the Exchequer not to change advance corporation tax? Would she like to explain why it would have a negative impact on charities, and undertake to talk to the charities about any such proposals?

Dawn Primarolo: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor heard that and will take it as a Budget representation. All hon. Members will want to ensure that charities are properly dealt with in the tax system.

Financial Regulation

18. **Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to improve financial regulation. [1603]

Mr. Darling: I explained a few moments ago the Government's policy on the reform of the regulatory system. We are making good progress towards the reforms that we want to achieve.

Mr. Goggins: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will he agree to keep the House fully informed about future developments on the Securities and Investments Board? Will he also ensure the maximum possible protection for pensioners and savers?

Mr. Darling: I can certainly give the House those assurances. Not only will we keep the House informed through parliamentary questions, but the legislation required to implement our reforms on the Bank of England's role in monetary policy decisions and its supervisory role will be introduced in the near future. I am sure that there will be many hours of debate on the Floor of the House and in Committee to enable hon. Members to contribute their opinions in the normal way.

Mr. Willetts: Will the Chief Secretary confirm that the most difficult questions will be those relating to whether a bank in difficulty will be allowed to fail or whether the risks to the system as a whole mean that it should be assisted? Will he clarify whether such decisions will be for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the new financial regulator or the Governor of the Bank of England?

Mr. Darling: The position will be made clear in legislation. The hon. Gentleman is right. When there are problems with banks, the public and the banking system need to know where responsibility lies. The Bank of England is the lender of last resort, but with problems of the magnitude of the collapse of Barings bank—I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was at the Treasury at the time, but I may be wrong and he may be well aware of the arrangements—the Chancellor has always been consulted. That happened with Barings and with Johnson Matthey in the 1980s.

UK Beef Exports

3.31 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East) (*by private notice*): To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the implications of the decision of the European Union veterinary committee to reject proposals designed to relax the ban on UK beef exports.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Dr. John Cunningham): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for this opportunity to inform the House of developments.

The terms of the Florence agreement for lifting the export ban on British beef provided for a number of steps, including on meat from animals in certified herds. It envisaged that the proposals would be first considered by the Commission's scientific advisory committee before the Commission made changes to the European Union legislation.

On 25 February this year, the previous United Kingdom Government submitted their proposals for a certified herds scheme to the Commission, which passed them to the Scientific Veterinary Committee for an opinion. The committee delivered its opinion yesterday and expressed concern on five points relating to the identification of animals, the tracing of animals on farms and of their meat through the slaughterhouse, and the amount of veterinary supervision involved. The committee suggested that changes needed to be made to the UK proposals before they would be acceptable.

It is disappointing that the Scientific Veterinary Committee has asked for further clarification when it did not take up our offer to send an expert to explain our proposals at an earlier stage in the process. We are not surprised that it has some criticisms. We are already considering carefully the points made and will give a detailed technical response very soon. Our officials are in Brussels today, and discussions will continue over the next few days.

We recognise that all consumers will be anxious for full assurances, in line with sound scientific assessments of risk. We shall press for the removal of the ban where those assurances can be given. I shall keep the House fully informed of developments.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does the Minister accept that, as the Government's endeavour to resolve the bovine spongiform encephalopathy crisis by making an offer of providing independent advice was rejected, despite the new positive approach and the lack of confrontation, we have simply had another slap in the face based on wholly irrational arguments, such as the definition of a herd? Has not the time come for the Government to impose restrictions, under article 36, on imports from nations whose standards of safety are lower than ours?

Will the Minister endeavour to persuade his colleagues in Europe that the real problem, which will have to be overcome somehow, discussed and faced up to, is the appalling, horrendous over-production of beef in Europe, which costs the taxpayer a fortune, which it is estimated will produce about 2 million tonnes of surplus by the end of the decade and which produces no benefit to anyone? Does the Minister accept that, despite all his hard work and despite the Government's endeavours for non-confrontation and friendship, they have simply had another slap in the face? They should do something now.

Dr. Cunningham: There are three substantive points in what the hon. Gentleman has very fairly put to me. I never anticipated that I would be able to undo in five weeks all the disastrous misjudgments on the issue by the previous Government over the past five years. The proposals were, after all, submitted by the hon. Gentleman's own Government and not by me. I decided, however, that it was proper and sensible to proceed with those proposals because of the consequences of the beef ban for the whole of the United Kingdom and for our beef industry. Whatever progress I can make, I shall endeavour to make on the basis of those and new proposals that I am formulating.

I do not regard this as a slap in the face. I have had two perfectly rational conversations today with Commissioner Bonino and Commissioner Fischler about very quickly trying to resolve the outstanding questions. There is no row going on. It is perfectly reasonable for the independent Scientific Veterinary Committee—this is not a Commission decision—to raise some questions about these important matters. We shall do our best to answer those questions quickly and fully.

The hon. Gentleman made a point about the beef regime in Europe. Of course I agree with him about that. Most, if not all, parties in the House recognise that we need fundamental reform of the common agricultural policy, including the beef regime.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Does my right hon. Friend accept that as British consumers have accepted that beef from pedigree herds is perfectly safe and are increasingly buying it, it would be criminally unjust if farmers who have pedigree herds, in England and in other parts of the United Kingdom, were made to pay for a point of view that is not scientifically based and is totally unacceptable? To push people into bankruptcy on that basis would be totally unacceptable.

Dr. Cunningham: It is very difficult to argue that the opinions of an independent scientific committee of experts are not scientifically based. Those people were appointed to advise the Commission exactly because of their independent scientific status. Of course I agree with my hon. Friend that we should do everything possible to ensure that, where we can develop an effective certified herds scheme, our own beef producers are able to take advantage of it.

I also agree with my hon. Friend on the point about consumers being given the same levels of protection. It is exactly for that reason that I announced last week that I was not prepared to countenance indefinitely imports of beef to Britain from countries where BSE existed, unless that beef was subject to the same stringent safeguards as beef produced in this country.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does the Minister accept that his response will be a grave disappointment to the House and to beef farmers, including myself? Is he aware of the current state of the beef market and of the desperate anxiety felt by many farmers? Has he naught to offer for their comfort today? Does he not feel, in all humility,

just a little chastened by the revelation that warm words and soundbites will not in themselves get us all we want in Europe?

Does the Minister accept that the certified herds scheme, developed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), was well founded and based on the best scientific advice? In spite of that setback, will the Minister press on with the selective cull scheme?

Does the Minister also accept from the Conservative Benches the assurance that we shall support any reasonable supplementary measures that he now proposes, including those related to maternal transmission, which are based on scientific studies initiated during our time in office? In particular, will he clarify the position on the implications of any redefinition of cohort groups for revisits to herds for which the selective cull has already been completed?

Finally, will the Minister bear it in mind that, although the House will accept measures based on scientific judgment and taken in good faith to lift the export ban, we cannot be forced beyond that? Does he agree that the ban has never had any sound legal basis? Will he confirm that he will vigorously prosecute our current legal case in the European Court?

Dr. Cunningham: In view of the diatribe at the start of the hon. Gentleman's question, his use of the word "humility" in respect of the Government is rather misplaced. A little humility on the Conservative Benches would not come amiss, given their Government's responsibility for the scandal of the development of BSE in Britain and its consequences for all our beef producers and dairy farmers. The hon. Gentleman is ill placed to champion the rights of farmers, given the abysmal record of the Conservative Government and of his right hon. and hon. Friends on the issue.

Of course we are pressing ahead with the selective cull, the over-30-months scheme and other such matters, but we would have been better placed had the Conservative Government started the selective cull when they should have, rather than delaying it until the early weeks of this year. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House will recall the former Prime Minister and the former Foreign Secretary returning from Florence and promising that, as a result of their negotiations, the beef ban would be lifted by November 1996. What a fraud that was.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): Is not the real problem that the certified herds scheme that the previous Government submitted to the Commission was inherently flawed? Will my right hon. Friend produce proposals as soon as possible to satisfy scientists, consumers and farmers alike?

Dr. Cunningham: Yes. I agree with my hon. Friend. Some weaknesses in the scheme have been identified and officials from MAFF are today discussing how we can improve the scheme and get it accepted. I want to persevere with the scheme. It is basically a good idea to have certified herds qualifying to export their beef. I see no sense in abandoning the scheme simply because one or two problems have been identified. We shall press ahead with trying to resolve them.

As I said, I have spoken with both the Commissioners involved today. They want to help us resolve the difficulties and I am hopeful that we can make rapid progress. We do so in the interests first and foremost of the beef farmers and beef producers, secondly, in the interests of British consumers and thirdly, in the interests of our economy. We want to end the beef ban.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the Minister accept that beef farmers throughout Scotland, Wales and England are now facing serious problems as a cumulative result of the dire consequences of mismanagement over that period, mostly under Conservative rule—*[Interruption.]* It was 13 and a half months. Does the Minister accept that the critical issue now is not whether we can open the export door again, but whether we can achieve some harmonisation of standards throughout the single market so that the certified herds scheme, specified bovine offals and all the other controls to which the British public are entitled to look as an assurance of public safety are applied to all exports throughout the so-called single market? Is it not about time for real action to be taken to deal with imports from countries elsewhere in the European Union and outside it, which cannot reach those standards?

Is it not a fact that the previous Government took no action whatever to deal with the problem, no doubt because they were only too pleased that their friends in the food processing industry—including the burger chains—were able to import beef of low standard at low cost? Is it not critical now to assure the British people that all the beef that is available in Britain is of the same standard as that on which we insist here?

Dr. Cunningham: I accept no responsibility on the part of the Government for the circumstances that prevail in the British beef industry today. The hon. Gentleman said that they were mostly the responsibility of the previous Administration, but they are totally the responsibility of the previous Administration. There is no doubt about that.

I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's specific points. Of course I want to see the same rules applied on specified risk materials across the European Union as a whole. That was the purpose of the announcement that I made last week on imports of beef to Britain. I have raised the matter with the Commissioners and with the president of the Agriculture Council, Mr. Van Aartsen. I have made it clear to them that I expect them to pursue the proposals which, to be fair, Franz Fischler has retabled for the Commission's consideration.

As I am a reasonable person in these matters, I have said that I shall give them until 22 July—the date of the next Agriculture Council—to make a decision on that point. If they have not made a decision by then, the draft orders to take action against beef imports that have not been given the same rigorous treatment as our own will be tabled. Those draft orders are on my desk now.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, while he makes and continues to make vigorous efforts to have the export ban lifted, it would be wrong for him to make the same mistake that the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) made when he announced in the House that the ban would be lifted on 20 November last year? Does he also agree that one of the problems identified by

[Mr. George Stevenson]

the committee is that of identifying animals both on and off the farm? Will he assure the House that the Government are making every effort to ensure that that problem is tackled in earnest?

Dr. Cunningham: I certainly want to avoid all the mistakes made by the previous Government in dealing with the European Union on this and other issues. There is little point in the aggressive, confrontational approach suggested by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), when we start not from a position of strength but from a position of considerable weakness as a result of the failures and the record of the previous Conservative Government. So I certainly do not intend to set any dates or make any claims for an early resolution to a complex and deep-seated series of problems that we have to resolve—first, the problems on specified risk materials, secondly, the problems of confidence in the consumer market, and, last but not least, the lack of political credibility on this issue with our European partners. None of the mistakes of the previous Government will be repeated by me.

As for my hon. Friend's last point about farm visits, thanks to the excellent work of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, we have rapidly accelerated work on the selective cull scheme, to the point at which more than 9,000 farm visits have been made. All those animals have to be traced and identified, and the farmers have to co-operate in that process. It is not an easy or uncomplicated process. We want to press on with it as quickly as we can, and we are doing so.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): Beef farmers face a serious situation at present. The Minister recently confirmed his awareness of concern about the standard of much of the imported beef coming into Britain. The Ministry has helpfully published excellent results from recent inspections of slaughterhouses, which confirm the high standard of the beef that is now produced in Britain. Are not those factors categorical grounds on which the Minister could approach McDonald's and the other major burger companies? If the lower-quality beef used in burgers were purchased in Britain, it would significantly support the beef price. How far is the right hon. Gentleman getting in his discussions with the burger companies?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his measured and effective intervention. He is right to say that we forecast imports this year of some 160,000 metric tonnes of beef into Britain—between 20 and 25 per cent. of the beef consumed in the UK market. That is a considerable import penetration of the domestic market. I assure him that I have already approached the major importers. I am asking them not only for their advice on the matter, but whether they would like to talk to me about how we might help them to change their minds.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend knows the appalling cost to the nation, to farmers and to all in the meat industry of the previous Government's appalling mishandling of the matter. Can he give the current figures for BSE incidence in herds? Will he make it absolutely clear that it is the policy of his Department not to dodge the issues as the previous Government did, but to solve the problem as soon as possible?

Dr. Cunningham: My hon. Friend is right. The costs are horrendous: £1.5 billion and rising to the British taxpayer. Let me add that the previous Administration did not make sufficient provision in public expenditure to cover all the costs—just another of the little ticking time bombs that we have found in the public finances since the general election. The costs to the meat industry have also been catastrophic: some £800 million. The cost to farmers is almost incalculable. The financial consequences alone are truly horrendous.

The incidence of BSE, at the latest count on 4 June—my hon. Friend the Minister of State and I now have a weekly update of the figures—showed that there had been—[Hon. Members: "Reading".] Of course I am reading; I want to get the figure right. The figures showed that there had been 169,349 cases of BSE, which is currently running at 100 cases a week. That is a much reduced rate, but it is still much higher than in any other similarly affected country.

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that this is very bad news for Northern Ireland, which exports a greater percentage of its meat than does any other part of United Kingdom? I understand that, while the overall scheme was rejected, favourable comments were made about its application—albeit with certain amendments—to Northern Ireland because of enhanced computer traceability in that part of the United Kingdom. Will the Minister insist that those amendments are made quickly and, when they are made, that the scheme be accepted for Northern Ireland, so that we can get rid of the iniquitous beef ban?

Dr. Cunningham: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about the critical importance of the matter to Northern Ireland's economy. The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) and his colleagues came to impress that point on me only a few days ago. We had a long conversation about the impact of BSE on farmers in Northern Ireland and the considerable significance of agriculture generally to Northern Ireland's economy: 75 per cent. of beef produced there used to be exported and cannot be now.

I am very well aware of the force of the hon. Gentleman's case, but he is wrong to describe the scheme as having been rejected. The scheme has not been rejected; questions have been asked about its particulars. The questions have not even been considered by the Commissioners yet. That is why I spoke on the telephone today to both Commissioners, to ask them to help us to answer the questions expeditiously and effectively so that the scheme can be accepted.

I want to make the best progress I can in dealing with those matters, certainly in the interests of farmers in Northern Ireland, but also in the interests of farmers in the United Kingdom as a whole. I acknowledge that there has been particularly good progress in Northern Ireland on registration, the selective cull and other matters necessary to fulfil the terms of the Florence agreement. If

I had not recognised that, the hon. Member for Upper Bann and his colleagues would have left me in no doubt about it.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): In line with the suggestions of the Scientific Veterinary Committee, will my right hon. Friend consider adopting a two-part strategy? First, as the hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) said, he should press for an immediate lifting of the ban in Northern Ireland because of traceability. Secondly, for mainland Britain, he should work towards lifting restrictions on all cattle born after 1 August 1996, at which date we can guarantee that there was no contaminated beef. That would mean effectively a progressive lifting of the ban as those cattle reached 30 months.

Dr. Cunningham: I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that, if I could get results simply by insisting that the ban be lifted in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, I would so insist. It is not quite that simple. As there are questions about the certified herds scheme, which apply equally to Northern Ireland as to other parts of the United Kingdom, I must answer those questions to the advantage of Northern Ireland as well as other parts of the UK. As I have said repeatedly this afternoon, I want to do that as quickly and effectively as I can. The advantage of the certified herds scheme being approved is that it would apply to the whole of the UK, including Northern Ireland.

My hon. Friend's important second point was about a birth date after which we could export beef from anywhere in the UK. I have discussed that again with Commissioners Fischler and Bonino. I raised the matter with them in May and I discussed it again with Mr. Fischler today on the telephone. We are formulating new proposals along the lines suggested by my hon. Friend, and I shall keep the House informed of progress.

Mr. John Swinney (North Tayside): It is rather difficult to get to the nub of the Secretary of State's statement. On the one hand, he is telling us that there are one or two problems with the scheme. On the other, he is saying that he is not giving us a definitive time scale within which the ban can be lifted. Will the Secretary of State give us some definitive guidance on how swift progress will be to have the beef ban lifted? Will he consider the proposals that have long been on the table, which have been endorsed by the European Union as an opportunity for the ban to be lifted in Scotland, as a priority within the United Kingdom?

Dr. Cunningham: I do not want to fall out with anyone in the Chamber during my first appearance at the Dispatch Box in my present role in this Parliament. I say gently to the hon. Gentleman that I am not a Secretary of State but the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Be that as it may, I am not being contradictory when I say that I want to resolve the problems as quickly as I can, but that I am not going to name a date. It would be unrealistic and misleading to do so. I have no idea how long it will take to resolve the problems. After all, the previous Prime Minister promised the nation that the entire ban would be lifted by November 1996. Here we are in June 1997 and none of the ban has been lifted.

It would be foolish in the extreme for me to start speculating about dates. I am certainly not going to raise false hopes. Perhaps that will disappoint the hon. Gentleman and his constituents, but I recognise the nature and scale of the problems in Scotland because many of my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent Scottish constituencies, like the hon. Gentleman, have left me in no doubt about the importance of the matter to Scotland. I shall work as effectively and quickly as I can to resolve the problems, but I shall not speculate on how long that will take.

Mr. Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): In addition to the terms of the Florence agreement, has my right hon. Friend any further proposals that will lead to the lifting of the beef ban? In particular, does he recognise that his recent comments about tightening import controls in the United Kingdom, unless common and improved standards of hygiene in slaughterhouses are introduced throughout Europe, have been widely welcomed by British beef producers?

Dr. Cunningham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. We are looking at other possibilities for action that would help in the lifting of the ban, either in part or in whole. I have already referred to one: a birth date after which any beef produced anywhere in the United Kingdom would be eligible for export. We have to deal with the outstanding matter of the scientific evidence on maternal transmission, and we need to bring forward proposals to the Commission on that important issue. We are working on those. I shall keep the House informed on that matter.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind comments about the statement that I made last week. I have been quite emphatic about that statement. I want to see a European Union-wide approach to the removal of specified risk materials, but in the absence of such an approach, we shall act on our own account.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): May I offer support to the right hon. Gentleman for what he has said today about the need for the same hygiene standards and for the risk materials to be removed, having pressed that point in the House for 15 months? He will also know that I have always taken the view that this should be not a matter of dispute across the Floor of the House, but a matter between the House and this country, and the rest of the European Union.

Notwithstanding the short time that the right hon. Gentleman has been in his post, on which I congratulate him, does he not feel that, in a sense, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) said at the beginning of his private notice question, all that has happened is that he has again been given a slap in the face? Indeed, it is not just him, but the British beef industry. The ban is unjustified and must be lifted without delay.

Dr. Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman started by being supportive and congratulatory, and I thank him for that, but it is no good him wagging his finger at me and saying, "The ban must be lifted without delay." I do not recall him saying that in the previous Parliament, when all sorts of false promises were being made from the Government Dispatch Box by Conservative Ministers. The hon. Gentleman is rational enough to know that there is just no hope of the ban being lifted without further delay. That is unrealistic. Much as I agree with his general point that we are doing everything that is reasonable in the circumstances, it is simply not going to happen that way.

[Dr. Cunningham]

Before I sit down, I had better apologise to the House, because I have already given some information that was not accurate. I said earlier, in answer to a question, that officials had made more than 9,000 farm visits. That is not true. We have identified more than 9,000 farm visits to be made. At the moment, 3,600 of the farms have been visited. I apologise to the House for that.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Speaker: Order. I shall end this exchange. Hon. Members will find that there may very soon be a debate on these matters, and I shall remember them.

Business of the House

4.2 pm

Mr. Alastair Goodlad (Eddisbury): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Ann Taylor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 16 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at Seven o'clock.

TUESDAY 17 JUNE—Second Reading of the Local Government Finance (Supplementary Credit Approvals) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE—Until 2 pm, there will be debates on the motion for the Adjournment of the House.

Completion of remaining stages of the Firearms (Amendment) Bill.

THURSDAY 19 JUNE—For three hours, there will be a debate on the common agricultural policy, on a Government motion. Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 20 JUNE—Debate on the Child Support Agency on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 23 JUNE—Second Reading of the Local Government (Contracts) Bill.

Later that week, I expect to find time for an Opposition day.

Government legislation will also be taken that week, probably the Plant Varieties Bill.

I also hope to find time for the draft Appropriation (No. 2) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

At this stage, I am unable to give the House the precise details of the days on which these items will be taken. There will be discussions in the usual way.

FRIDAY 27 JUNE—Debate on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

[*Thursday 19 June—Relevant European Community Documents: 6627/97, relating to agricultural prices for 1997/98 and related measures; 9550/96, relating to a support system for producers of arable crops; 9876/96, relating to ewe and suckler cow premium schemes; 6112/97, relating to agri-monetary adjustment; 5617/97, relating to the Court of Auditors Special Report No. 1/97.*]

Mr. Goodlad: I thank the right hon. Lady for giving us the business for next week and the partial business for the week after.

Now that the date of the Budget has been announced, when will the Finance Bill be published, when will the Second Reading debate be held and how long will be allowed for the Committee stage?

What progress is being made in setting up the Select Committees? Is the right hon. Lady aware that we have consistently stressed the importance of the speedy establishment of those Committees and that the House is becoming concerned at the lack of movement, particularly in respect of the departmental Select Committees and the

Select Committee on Standards and Privileges, which will clearly have work to do, not least in respect of the allegations about the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar)? When does the right hon. Lady expect a statement to be made to the House on the circumstances surrounding the hon. Gentleman?

Will the right hon. Lady ensure that the Prime Minister comes to the House to make a statement following his discussions with the German Chancellor about the future of the Eurofighter aircraft project in view of its great importance for jobs in Britain, particularly in Lancashire?

Is the right hon. Lady aware of the current speculation about the Government's plans concerning prescription charges? Can she confirm that the Government do not intend to make pensioners pay those charges? If not, when will a statement be made to the House detailing the Government's intentions?

In the light of the change to Government policy in respect of primary-age children and the assisted places scheme, which the Prime Minister announced during questions yesterday, will the right hon. Lady please arrange for a statement to be made to the House clarifying the position and setting out exactly the Government's intentions in the matter for the information of those families involved?

Finally, in the light of the unsatisfactory reply given by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to the private notice question of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor), will she confirm that, either during or before next week's debate on the common agricultural policy, the Minister will update the House on the prospects for a lifting of the ban on British beef exports and banning the import of European beef?

Mrs. Taylor: I can confirm that the Finance Bill should be ready shortly after my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made his Budget statement, and we shall have discussions through the usual channels about the amount of time that is required for the Bill's various stages.

I have said on several occasions from the Dispatch Box that I, too, want to see the Select Committees established as quickly as possible. We have made some progress in terms of establishing the Select Committee on the Modernisation of the House of Commons and one or two other important Committees. I attach particular importance to the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and discussions are going on through the usual channels and with the minority parties on that matter.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will agree that the Labour party acted quickly with regard to the allegations against my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland involved the police in investigations into that matter. As I have said before, if the allegations come within Sir Gordon Downey's remit, obviously consideration could be given to his inquiring into the matter. But it is important that we all recognise that the matter is with the police, who may or may not take action.

The right hon. Gentleman asked again about the future of the Eurofighter, on which I made some comments last week. I repeat that the Government are fully committed to the Eurofighter programme. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence met the German Defence Minister in Bonn last week to discuss that specific project. The German Defence Minister made it clear that he thought that Germany needed the Eurofighter, and we hope that progress can be made on the matter.

Prescription charges were dealt with by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury when he said yesterday that there were prescription anomalies. He was referring to the fact that one group of illnesses is covered by prescription exemptions whereas others are not. We are not making any commitment on that: it will be part of any departmental review.

No further statements on the assisted places scheme are planned for next week. The comments that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made yesterday were very clear. For a member of the previous Government to complain about debates on BSE is a cheek, and I have no plans to provide time for such a debate.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will my right hon. Friend examine early-day motion 112?

[*That this House notes that a year after the appointment of General McCaffrey as America's Drug Czar, statistics prove that teenage drug abuse is soaring, reports of drug-related corruption have multiplied and the cities of New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles have suffered startling jumps in use and overdoses; observes that the Drug Czar has been called a 'drugs nanny and a disaster'; and urges the Government not to repeat America's mistakes by creating a Drug Czar but to set up a Royal Commission to consider alternative policies.*]

Sadly, the drug tsar appointed in America 16 months ago has not fulfilled the promise of his office. Since he was appointed, drug use, drug deaths and drug corruption have increased at a remarkable rate. We should consider carefully all the possible solutions to deal with the ever-increasing toll of drug abuse and drug deaths. A royal commission should investigate the use of legal and illegal drugs before we take any new policy initiatives that may end in failure, as they have in America.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend's views on this subject are well known, and I do not share them. If we appoint a drug tsar—I am willing to consider different titles for that position—we will ensure greater co-ordination in our campaign against drug use. Only this week, the Government announced that many projects up and down the country will receive drug challenge fund money. Those schemes are accepted by the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Employment, the Home Office and the police as a good way of learning how best to tackle this difficult problem. My hon. Friend does not share our views and has a different approach, so I am afraid that I cannot agree with him.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Leader of the House tell us when we shall have an opportunity to debate early-day motion 103?

[*That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (General) Amendment Regulations 1997 (S.I., 1997, No. 852), dated 17th March 1997, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th March, in the last Session of Parliament, be annulled.*]

The motion incorporates our prayer to reverse the damaging changes that the Conservative Government made to housing benefit and council tax benefit. It has been endorsed by many Labour Members in early-day motion 88.

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

Will the right hon. Lady address the problem of time for debates on Europe? She will recall that on Monday we had a comparatively short debate on Europe instead of the usual two-day debate, with the result that many hon. Members, particularly Labour Members, were not called.

I note that the business announced for next week allows for only a truncated debate on the common agricultural policy. That is contrary to the precedent of a full-day debate. Will the right hon. Lady guarantee that we will have a full, two-day debate on a Government motion after the Amsterdam summit so that we can accommodate all the views in the House, notably the many and varied views of Conservative Members, which may not be properly represented in a one-day debate?

Now that the right hon. Lady can give us an idea of the time scale after the Budget for consideration of the Finance Bill, will she tell us when she expects the summer recess to be?

Mrs. Taylor: With regard to the hon. Gentleman's first point about the problem of housing benefits and young people, we all recognise the difficulties that have been caused by the changes made by the previous Government. Unfortunately, the savings that were to come from those changes form part of the expenditure plans that we inherited. As my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said yesterday, the Government are reviewing all the options. We shall have to see what can be done in this field, as in many others, and I do not want to pre-empt any decision that may be made.

Discussions took place through the usual channels about the debate on Europe next Thursday, and it was thought that three hours would be for the convenience of the House on this occasion. I am sure that hon. Members will want to participate in that debate.

I cannot guarantee the two-day debate that the hon. Gentleman wants following the Amsterdam summit, but I have said that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will make a statement to the House about the outcome. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that if he wants an extra two days' debate, that makes it even more unlikely that I shall be able to say anything in the near future in answer to his question about the summer recess.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Could my right hon. Friend arrange for a statement to be made about the continuing crisis in the coal mining industry, which is now privately owned? We hear stories of the evil monster, the Tory Budge, sacking workers because they refuse to work two consecutive 11-hour shifts, and for no other reason. At the same time, he is going around the old pit villages recruiting people to work two 11-hour shifts at the weekend, although some of those people work from Monday to Friday in other occupations. That is the scandal of a privatised industry—a dangerous industry, given that people are being required to work for so many hours.

Mrs. Taylor: I cannot guarantee my hon. Friend a statement, but I think that the safety implications could be significant, and I shall undertake to draw them to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): May I ask the Leader of the House again whether we can have an urgent debate on the Department for Education and Employment, on what resources it has and on whether it is using them effectively?

Yet another week has passed, and the Department has made no decision on the age of transfer of pupils in Buckinghamshire. That is causing a great deal of anxiety to parents, pupils and schools, and is already beginning to disrupt children's education. I think that we need a debate so that we can see how the Department has time to do its job. It appears to have time to appoint more political advisers; why does it not have time to make a decision on Buckinghamshire children?

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Lady was a Minister. She will know that, when decisions of that kind are made, many factors must be taken into account, including all the representations that are made. *[Interruption.]* She may say that the decision could have been made before the election, but that does not mean that the new Ministers will automatically agree with her conclusion.

I think that my right hon. and hon. Friends in the Department for Education and Employment have been very active, in an extremely positive way. Many parents throughout the country will welcome the statements that we have heard emphasising the need to improve children's education from the earliest stage, and about extra literacy classes in the summer. I shall, of course, undertake to ensure that my right hon. and hon. Friends know of the hon. Lady's concern about the delay, but I do not think that she is right to say that they have been inactive. I think that they have been working very successfully.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will my right hon. Friend grant me one favour that I failed to gain from her distinguished and honourable predecessor, who is no longer with us? I refer to a debate on prisons. At present, we not only have a floating prison ship; we have overcrowding in prisons, there are not enough places for female prisoners and there are days when there are lock-outs because of the lack of space. There is a good deal to discuss, and the Select Committee on Home Affairs will not be established for some time. The matter is urgent, and it should be debated before the summer is out.

Mrs. Taylor: My hon. Friend has put his request in a measured way, looking to the longer term rather than just to next week. I am sure that, given his ingenuity, he will find time to raise prison issues, probably on more than one occasion. Home Office questions are coming up shortly, and no doubt my hon. Friend will be able to explore other ways of raising those issues.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The right hon. Lady will understand the disappointment of my farming constituents that she has been able to find only three hours for a debate next Thursday on the common agricultural policy. Will she undertake to find more time for a debate on agriculture before we break for the recess? She will understand the acute anxieties felt by farmers in my

constituency—be they beef, dairy or arable farmers—about the current agricultural crisis. I urge her to find a full day on which we can debate this serious issue.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. and learned Gentleman will have heard what my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said a few moments ago. My right hon. Friend recognises the anxiety that the crisis has caused, but he also recognises the origins of the problem and the fact that it was the previous Government who made it even more difficult for us to get the settlement that we want.

The hon. and learned Gentleman asked for a debate of more than three hours next week. The time for the debate was agreed through the usual channels. If he wants extra time to debate this or any other matter, he will note that I have said that I hope to find time for an Opposition day in the week after next.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for an urgent debate on the decision by the new Conservative-controlled Kent county council to freeze all capital spending, including that on schools? That will mean that children in my constituency and others in Kent will be taught in quite unsatisfactory conditions and, of course, that runs counter to the Government's intention of improving quality in schools and in education generally.

Mrs. Taylor: I thank my hon. Friend, but I am afraid that I will not be able to find time next week for such a debate. Of course, it is open to him to pursue other means of raising the issue, such as in a Wednesday morning debate. I was not aware of the difficulties that he mentions in Kent county council, but I shall make sure that my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and the Deputy Prime Minister are aware of his concerns.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Will the right hon. Lady ensure that questions that are put down for written answer on a named day are answered promptly at 3.30 pm? I draw her attention to questions that are down for written answer today. Questions 53 to 56 are pertinent to the extraordinary assault on the freedom of the press by the Lord Chancellor at a press conference on Friday. As I speak, those questions have not been answered.

Mrs. Taylor: Obviously, I was not aware that the questions had not been answered, but I shall make inquiries.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): Will the Leader of the House try to find extra time to discuss the current review of departmental spending and to debate particularly the problems of computers in recognising the year 2000? Each Department was set a target of a full audit by October of this year and most of those should now be well under way. The system should be corrected by December 1998, but the likely cost to the Government of putting this right appears to be rising, to a figure in excess of £1 billion or possibly even several billion. This is not an inter-party problem: it is a recognition that the Government and all private-sector firms face potential catastrophe unless they get their act together quickly.

Mrs. Taylor: I understand the problem to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It has been described as the millennium time bomb and I know that people in the public and private sectors have been looking at ways to deal with it. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary in his Department have been spending a considerable amount of time on it. At the moment, it is thought that the public sector may be ahead of the private sector. I do not think that I can find time for a debate on the matter, but I am sure that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has heard the hon. Gentleman and that, if he wishes to raise further points, the Minister will be willing to listen.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the right hon. Lady's hopeful suggestion that we may have a debate on Northern Ireland appropriations in two weeks. Yesterday and today, there has been concern throughout the House about the Barnett formula and the possibility of changes. Would it be possible to have a statement this week on that issue, so that the House can be clear that any review will deal not merely with numbers, but, rather, with need?

Mrs. Taylor: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that, for many years, the Barnett formula has formed the basis for many allocation decisions. Obviously, my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury yesterday put that in the context of the overall spending review that the Government are conducting. He was not announcing specific plans for any change.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): May I repeat my request for an urgent debate on defence, to give the Government the opportunity to clarify the confusion over the future of the Eurofighter and Trident projects?

The Prime Minister said during the general election campaign that Eurofighter was imperative for this country's defence, we have seen Ministers trotting off to Germany, and we have been told again today that Eurofighter is safe; yet, only yesterday, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) asked the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, during the statement on the spending review, whether the Government were looking at spending on Trident and Eurofighter. We were told that the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence had announced a defence review, which would take six months to complete, but that the spending review would take 12 months to complete and did not exempt Trident and Eurofighter. That confusion is serious for our defence forces and for the defence of this country.

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman is making heavy weather of what has been said. I told him earlier that, only this week, the Secretary of State for Defence had had discussions with his German counterpart. The German Cabinet will meet on 11 July to discuss the federal budget. Apparently, the German Defence Minister is in favour of Eurofighter. There is no confusion whatever in the Government's attitude. Defence Question Time takes place on Monday and if the hon. Gentleman wants to take the matter further, he can do so.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): Can the Leader of the House make time available for a statement next week—indeed, sooner if possible—on the industrial action that is about to take place on Connex South Central

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

services, which will cause misery tomorrow to many of my constituents and to many other commuters trying to get into London? Will she draw to the attention of the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions early-day motion 104 so that he can reply to it in detail?

[*That this House notes with concern the forthcoming industrial action amongst drivers employed by Connex South-Central; believes this will cause considerable inconvenience to members of the public, disrupt the economy and undermine the efforts being made to raise confidence in rail travel and effect a transfer from road to rail; recognises the right both of Connex to seek changes to working practices and of ASLEF to resist reductions in safety; and calls upon the two sides to renew their efforts to resolve the dispute as a matter of urgency, on ASLEF to postpone any industrial action pending these further talks taking place, and on the Government to put pressure on both sides to reach a sensible and amicable agreement*]

Mrs. Taylor: The hon. Gentleman may know that the Government's attitude is that this is a matter for the employer and employees, and not for the Government. Therefore, I do not anticipate a statement at this time. There is a real danger of inconvenience tomorrow, but he will have to recognise that it is a matter for those parties directly concerned.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): May I reinforce the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow)? Is the Leader of the House aware that, today, I had 17 pages of cancellations sent through by Connex South Central? Is she also aware that I have spoken to Lew Adams, general secretary of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen—ASLEF—and to the managing director of Connex South Central, both of whom say that they are willing to sit down tomorrow and talk? However, no date has been fixed for talks, trains are being cancelled and commuters in my constituency will be greatly inconvenienced by the strike. Will she have a word with the Minister of Transport, to knock some heads together, because both sides appear willing to talk?

Mrs. Taylor: If both sides were willing to talk constructively, we would not be facing a dispute. I recognise the problems that could be experienced if the dispute goes ahead; and, from what the hon. Gentleman is saying, the people involved might be able to find a way out.

Points of Order

4.27 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North–East Bedfordshire): Madam Speaker, may I raise a point of order, of which I have given you notice? Sir Gordon Downey, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, is a much-respected servant of the House, but he is reported as having given an interview to *Counsel* magazine recently, in which he is quoted as saying:

"There is quite a strong case for further consideration as to whether or not we would be better off with professional politicians without outside interests."

The House will recognise that such a view is highly controversial and would give rise, if proposed, to serious constitutional issues, which are matters for the House itself or for Parliament. An expression of view on the matter by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards would appear, if—I repeat, if—he has been correctly reported, to sit most uneasily with his quasi-judicial functions. Would you be kind enough to make inquiries and to inform the House of the true position and of any guidance to officers that you think may be necessary?

Madam Speaker: I have noted the concern expressed by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. I have seen the comments made by Sir Gordon Downey and I have been in touch with him. I shall make certain that he is aware of the concerns expressed in the exchanges that have taken place on this point of order today.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your opinion on a new and highly undesirable change in the procedures of the House. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was asked 19 questions, which he was expected to answer in half an hour. During business questions last week, the shadow Leader of the House asked 21 questions and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House had only a minute or two in which to answer them. The shadow Leader of the House asked 16 questions today.

We are asked to relate business questions to the business of the House next week or in future and to request statements or debates. Of the 21 questions that the shadow Leader of the House asked last week, only seven sought statements or referred to new business of the House. Of his 16 questions today, only four sought statements or debates in the House. It is totally unreasonable to expect my right hon. Friend to provide adequate and intelligent answers to all of those questions. She is dealing with the business of the House: she is not a contestant on "Mastermind".

Madam Speaker: Obviously the hon. Gentleman brought his abacus to business questions. I cannot say that I have been counting, but I shall examine the record. I answered some 10 questions in about seven minutes in my state rooms this morning—I wish that Ministers could do as well.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek clarification arising from your reply to the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell). I assume that Sir Gordon Downey is in the same position as any other

Officer of the House. While I may or may not agree with his observations, Sir Gordon performs a particular job for the House and he is entitled to express his point of view. It would be rather unfortunate if we were to try to gag him and prevent him from expressing his views.

Sir Gordon's role is to try to maintain the standards in public life that the public would like to see observed. While some may disagree with his comments—I do not believe that we could have 650 full-time politicians in the House—

Madam Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is making an observation rather than raising a point of order. In answer to the proper question that he asked at the beginning of his remarks, Sir Gordon Downey is a senior Officer of the House.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Madam Speaker. You have said that you will express concern to Gordon Downey arising from the point of order raised by the Tory ex-Attorney-General, the right hon. and learned Member for North–East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell). Perhaps you could also inform him that the ex-Attorney-General is one of 164 Conservative Members. He is a lawyer and he probably wants another job now that his pay has been docked.

The arithmetic tells us that there are 418 Members on the Government side, almost all of whom will not be involved in consultancies. It is conceivable that Gordon Downey did the arithmetic as well, saw what happened in the general election, and decided that that is the way we should go: one Member of Parliament, one job. The Tories are squealing because they do not have as much money as they had before.

Madam Speaker: As I have said, I intend to make the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards aware of the exchanges that have taken place regarding this matter.

BILLS PRESENTED

Local Government (Contracts)

Mr. Secretary Prescott, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Dewar, Mr. Secretary Davies, Ms Hilary Armstrong, Mr. Nick Raynsford and Mr. Geoffrey Hoon, presented a Bill to make provision about the powers of local authorities (including probation committees and the Receiver for the Metropolitan Police District) to enter into contracts; and to enable expenditure of local authorities making administrative arrangements for magistrates' courts to be treated for some purposes as not being capital expenditure: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday next, and to be printed [Bill 5].

Plant Varieties

Dr. John Cunningham, supported by Mrs. Secretary Beckett, Mr. Secretary Dewar, Secretary Marjorie Mowlam, Mr. Secretary Davies and Mr. Jeff Rooker, presented a Bill to make provision about rights in relation to plant varieties; to make provision about the Plant Varieties and Seeds Tribunal; to extend the time limit for institution of proceedings for contravention of seeds regulations; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Monday next, and to be printed [Bill 6].

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (Matters relating exclusively to Wales)),

That the Matter of the Government's programme for Wales, being a Matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.—[*Mr. Graham Allen.*]

Question agreed to.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

4.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Glenda Jackson): I beg to move,

That this House, pursuant to section 9(4) of the Transport and Works Act 1992 ("the Act") as applied by section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996, approves the following proposals, contained in an application for an Order submitted under section 6 of the Act by Eurostar (UK) Limited on 23rd January 1997 and entitled The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Stratford Station and Subsidiary Works) Order, for

(1) The construction, maintenance and operation of—

(i) in the London Borough of Hackney and Newham, a station at Stratford for international and domestic services on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link with vehicular parking and other facilities in connection therewith; railways comprising down and up lines to serve international and domestic platforms at that station; and a station access road off Waterden Road, including a bridge over the River Lea;

(ii) in the London Borough of Hackney, a realignment and improvement of Waterden Road;

(iii) in the London Borough of Newham, a subway at the existing suburban Stratford station with a pedestrian link to the new station; and

(iv) in the London Boroughs of Camden and Islington, railways near St. Pancras to provide access between the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the West Coast Main Line by means of a connection to the North London Line.

(2) The authorisation of works ancillary to the above-mentioned works, including the stopping-up of York Way in the London Boroughs of Camden and Islington, the making of a means of access to and from that road and interference with waterways.

(3) The compulsory acquisition or use of land or rights in land for the intended works; compensation for this and for the injurious affection of land; and the compulsory use of subsoil.

It may be helpful if I open the debate with a brief explanation of the statutory process and the purpose of the order. Orders under the Transport and Works Act 1992—the TWA—have replaced private Bills as the means by which new railways, tramways and certain other works projects are normally authorised. Section 9 of the TWA gives Parliament a continuing and important role in relation to schemes that the Secretary of State believes are of national significance by making the approval of each House a precondition to the making of an order under the TWA.

If a resolution approving such proposals is passed in both this House and another place, the application will go forward for more detailed consideration at a public inquiry. It would then be for the Secretary of State to decide, in the light of the inspector's report, whether to authorise the proposals in question by making a TWA order. The Secretary of State is not bound so to do. Until he makes his decision, he must keep an open mind on the merits of the proposals. Nevertheless, in reaching that decision, he would take careful note of Parliament's view.

The section 9 procedure has been used only once before, for the ill-fated central railway project which was roundly rejected by the House last summer. I trust that there will be a more positive outcome today.

The use of this procedure in connection with the proposed Stratford station and the twin-track link to the north London and west coast main lines arises because section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996 provides specifically for these proposals, in any application for a TWA order, to be referred to Parliament under the section 9 procedure. That special provision was inserted in the CTRL Act with all-party support because the House wished to have an opportunity to give the proposals its formal support in principle. The Secretary of State is not required to form an opinion on their national significance.

The motion accordingly seeks the approval of the House for the proposals. It is phrased in this way, rather than in neutral terms, to enable us to secure a conclusive outcome in a single debate. If the House were to reject the motion, the scheme would, in effect, be dead, as the order could not be made. If the House passed the resolution—as, in this case, the Government recommend—the project would be considered in another place.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): My hon. Friend referred to the link to the west coast main line. I make a plea to her and to our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider a link to the east coast main line—I appreciate that it cannot be done under this order—so that we have a service to all the regions through orders similar to this one. I hope that Ministers will keep in mind the fact that we need the same services on the east coast as are proposed for the west coast.

Ms Jackson: I am sure that my hon. Friend understands that his proposal cannot be debated this afternoon, because it is not a matter covered in the order. However, I shall ensure that his strong representations on behalf of his constituents are brought to the attention of our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

As I was saying, only if the application is approved in both Houses can it proceed to a more detailed examination at a public inquiry.

I come now to the specific proposals that the House is asked to approve. The detailed case for the proposals will, with your leave, Mr. Deputy Speaker, be presented by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). I shall confine my comments to a short summary of the proposals and the representations received on them, and I shall set out the Government's position. A copy of the complete application, including plans and sections of the proposed works and the environmental statement, has been available for inspection in the Library since the application was made in January.

The application for the order was made by Eurostar (UK) Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of London and Continental Railways Ltd., which successfully bid for the contract to build the channel tunnel rail link. The works contained in the draft order were not included in the CTRL Act because the decision in principle to proceed with them came too late for inclusion in the Bill without seriously prejudicing its progress.

The proposed station at Stratford will provide a new intermediate stop for international and domestic services using the rail link. It will enable passengers to make connections with other railways services at Stratford, such as the London Underground Central and Jubilee lines, the docklands light railway and the north London and great eastern lines. The station will therefore give passengers a wider choice of access to international and domestic

services on the CTRL and make an important contribution to the Government's declared aim of establishing a more integrated public transport system.

The development of the station is expected to create sizeable regeneration benefits for the Stratford area, which is itself a focal point for development at the western end of the Thames gateway. Taking into account the scope for redevelopment of adjoining lands, including former railway lands, and the wider development opportunities in the lower Lea valley and the royal docks, the longer-term extra employment prospects for the area could be substantial.

The other main proposal in Eurostar's application that is closely associated with the Stratford station is for a twin-track connection from the CTRL to the north London and west coast main lines. Such a connection will enable trains to and from the channel tunnel to bypass St. Pancras station and to transfer directly to the north London and west coast main lines, thereby reducing journey times between mainland Europe and Scotland, the north and the midlands. Stratford station would be used as the London stop on those through trains. The twin-track connection would replace the single track provided in the 1996 Act and increase operational flexibility and reliability.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Can the Minister confirm that the promoter's intention is still to complete all the works that she mentioned without further recourse to public funds?

Ms Jackson: It is my understanding, given the contract into which the operator has entered with the Government, that there will be no further call on public funds.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): Will the Minister expand on that answer? What will happen if the firm goes into liquidation? Do Ministers have any contingency plans to ensure that works, once they are half begun, are completed, so that the project comes to fruition?

Ms Jackson: With respect to my hon. Friend, he has asked a hypothetical question. I repeat: the operator entered into a commercial, binding contract with the Government. We do not foresee any reason for it to break that contract.

The Department received 59 objections to or representations about the proposed works, copies of which have been placed in the Library. I will, however, summarise the main points raised.

There is concern that the station will cause excessive traffic on the surrounding road network and that inadequate provision is proposed for public transport and cyclists at the station. There is concern also about possible adverse environmental effects on the Bully Point nature reserve, on the River Lea, and about the loss without replacement of garden allotments, recreational amenities and metropolitan open land in the Lea valley, near Stratford.

Some statutory undertakers and local businesses have objected to the adverse effects of the proposed compulsory acquisition powers associated with the works or to the effects of the works on access to businesses by road and rail. Concerns have been expressed also about the adequacy of the design of the proposed pedestrian link at Stratford station. More generally, a few objectors have questioned the demand for a station at Stratford.

The London boroughs of Hackney and Islington have challenged the adequacy of the environmental statement in its assessment of some of the local environmental effects—particularly impacts on local traffic and transport—and the implications of operating additional channel tunnel services for local services on the north London line. Finally, the London borough of Newham has sought certain changes to the proposed planning conditions.

What is the Government's assessment of the proposals? If Parliament approves the resolutions, the Secretary of State would have a duty to decide whether the order should be made. His mind must remain open on that decision, and, in making it, he must specifically have regard to the inspector's report, after detailed consideration of the proposals and objections to them at a public inquiry. The issue for the House to decide today is whether, in principle, the proposals are worthy of proceeding to that more detailed examination. The Government have no doubt that they are worthy.

The objectors have raised a number of issues concerning the perceived adverse local impacts of the scheme on traffic levels, the environment and businesses. Those are matters that, quite properly, must be considered carefully before the order is determined. It will be open to the Secretary of State to amend provisions in the draft order or to change the planning conditions attaching to any deemed planning permission after considering any recommendations by the inquiry inspector. It would be for the promoter of the order to defend the adequacy of the environmental statement and to provide more information for the inquiry, if so requested by the inspector.

The Secretary of State is under a statutory obligation to consider the environmental statement in determining whether to make the order. In the Government's view, the objections do not raise fundamental issues that might dent our confidence in the proposals' overall merits. We are satisfied that the grounds of the objections to the application are of a nature that would be best considered at an inquiry.

We think that the proposed works are desirable in principle. They have the potential to create significant transport benefits by encouraging greater railway use, especially for travel to Europe. A new station at Stratford would also help to achieve a more integrated transport system in London. For local communities in the east Thames corridor, the works offer a real prospect of substantial benefits, with more jobs and much-needed urban regeneration.

The Government therefore have no hesitation in inviting the House to pass the order.

4.45 pm

Sir George Young (North–West Hampshire): The Opposition welcome the order. We give it our full support, and we are grateful to the Minister for her explanation of it.

Debates on the channel tunnel rail link and on Stratford international station have, on the whole, been friendly occasions, involving a small and familiar cast—most of whom I see in the Chamber today, although their places seem to have changed a bit. We will especially miss one player—the Under–Secretary of State for National Heritage, the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks)—who took part in every debate on the matter. To use

[Sir George Young]

a draughts analogy, however, he has reached the end of the board and helped himself to a crown. Understandably, he will not speak in today's debate.

I am delighted that the new Government are proceeding with the previous Government's policy on construction of a high-speed link, thereby harnessing the energy of the private sector in a major private finance initiative, routing the line through east London to achieve the regeneration benefits mentioned by the Minister and making it easier and quicker for passengers to travel from France to regions other than the south-east. I was delighted to hear that the Government will support the order under the Transport and Works Act 1992, thereby making necessary amendments to the original legislation.

The Minister described the effects of the measure, but I have a few questions. The briefing on the order states that construction of the station at Stratford will create jobs and "act as a catalyst" for east London. She mentioned those effects in her speech. At some point, however, I should like to know how the Government plan to reinforce her comments by proceeding with our Thames gateway strategy, which proposes more privately funded river crossings. Our strategy would build on proposals for a Stratford station by further improving transport infrastructure in east London and unlocking some of the large sites on either side of the river.

On road links, which are mentioned in the order, the Minister recently answered a parliamentary question from me, stating:

"no new starts on national schemes are planned for this financial year."—[*Official Report*, 9 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. *318*.]

I should like confirmation that her Department will play its part in building the roads that are necessary not only to make the station a success but to proceed with the regeneration of east London.

There are 56 objections to the works—mostly from organisations preserving their negotiating position—which I know that London and Continental Railways would like to resolve amicably. I should like to know whether any agencies or quangos for which the Minister's Department has responsibility is among the objectors.

In schedule 2, the order also refers to "compulsory purchase and compensation". The Minister will know that two reviews on compensation were in progress at the end of the previous Parliament. One of those—its members were the ombudsman and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration Select Committee—was narrowly and specifically focused on the relatively small number of households that would be affected by the channel tunnel rail link. It would be helpful if at some point, although not necessarily today, we knew what was happening with that review.

There was also a much broader review of compensation generally, involving a number of Government Departments. Again, it would be helpful to have at some point a timetable and details of the Government's approach to that overall review of compensation.

The Minister referred to one of the objections, which related to the provisions for buses and taxis. The Department's briefing note states that there is provision for 2,000 cars. I am sure that there will also be provision for buses and taxis, as the hon. Lady spoke about an integrated transport policy. I very much hope that the promoter will make it possible for people who arrive by bus and taxi to do so as conveniently as those who arrive by car.

I hope that the Minister will not think it churlish if I say that LCR must be allowed to make profits to carry out and pay for the works that we are debating so that it can deliver its share of the bargain. It has entered into substantial commitments, and needs to make a profit to service the equity that it has to raise. I therefore hope that we will be spared some of the more violent rhetoric that we sometimes hear from Labour Members about utilities that make a profit. The private finance initiative can work only if there is also a private profit initiative.

The TWA order is part of the revival of the railway, pioneered by the previous Government. Along with the Heathrow express, Thameslink 2000, the docklands light railway extension to Lewisham, the Croydon tram link and the Jubilee line extension, it is part of the substantial investment in public transport in London that the Government inherited from their predecessors. We welcome the order and give it our full support.

4.50 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I congratulate the Minister on the way in which she presented the order. I also congratulate the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) who, happily for us, now finds himself her shadow. My hon. Friend and the right hon. Gentleman have adopted a non-controversial approach to the scheme, which will bring the channel tunnel project to fruition to the benefit of the nation as a whole, rather than, as some of us feared initially, benefiting only London and the south-east.

I must declare an interest, as I am a member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers and chairman of Travel West Midlands, a bus company based in Birmingham and a wholly owned subsidiary of National Express.

The application under the Transport and Works Act 1992 seeks to put in place the last significant piece of the legislative framework for the channel tunnel rail link project. It will bring the benefits of the rail link to the widest possible community and, from that point of view, should be welcomed, as it has been by my hon. Friend and the right hon. Gentleman.

The application covers two aspects of the rail link that, at first sight, are quite unrelated. Powers are sought for a combined international and domestic station at Stratford, and for an improved connection between the rail link and the existing railway network in the King's Cross railway lands. However, there is a business relationship between the two.

London and Continental Railways, the promoter of the order, wishes to offer the best possible international service from other major centres as well as London. Its proposals mean that Eurostar trains from, for example, Manchester and the west midlands to the continent will pass directly from the existing network—a modernised network, we hope—on to the rail link via the improved connection which forms part of the application, without having to go to the rail link terminal at St. Pancras and reverse direction there.

Although it is to be welcomed, such a scheme deprives me of a joke, or what passed for a joke when I travelled around the country talking to various interested parties

about international services to and from the centres of Europe. The prospect of sitting at St. Pancras station, waiting while the driver walks the length of a 14-coach Eurostar train, is not one to gladden the hearts of those of us who travel from, for example, Birmingham. The fact that the trains will now carry on to the channel tunnel rail link through the new and improved double connection is to be greatly welcomed.

Hon. Members, or the exclusive bunch to whom the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire referred, will be aware that the original CTRL proposals referred only to a single-line connection from the west coast main line to the CTRL. Although it could have been used operationally, one does not have to be an anorak, as rail buffs are sometimes known, to appreciate that a single line is not conducive to trains rushing up and down in both directions, at least not at the same time. The replacement of that original proposal with the double-line link is to be greatly welcomed.

As I suggested, there will be a reduction in journey times as a result of the order. We are now looking at Paris being only four hours from Birmingham and a fraction over five hours from Manchester. Having bypassed St. Pancras as I outlined, those trains will be able to make their London stop at the new Stratford station. When the rail link and the west coast main line connection are open, more than 20 million people in the United Kingdom will live within four hours of Paris. There is therefore a clear business logic to the application, as well as enormous economic and regional benefits to be had from it. I hope that Members representing constituencies along the west coast main line, those—like me—with constituencies in the west midlands and those, again like me, at least hailing from the north-west will recognise the benefits that will result from the proposals.

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): The scheme will be of great benefit to east London, because there are approximately 120,000 unemployed people living within five miles of the proposed station. The scheme will help my constituents and others and will greatly benefit the economic regeneration of east London as well as cut our travelling times to the continent—it will take about two hours and 15 minutes to travel to Paris from Stratford.

Mr. Snape: I am doubly heartened to think that my hon. Friend can take members of his family to Paris in two hours and 15 minutes, but he will have to clear that with the Whips Office under the current regime. He is right to point out the benefits that will accrue to his constituency and to the citizens of east London, an area that has high levels of unemployment. As he says, that problem will undoubtedly be alleviated to some extent.

Stratford is already a major public transport hub, soon to benefit further from the opening of the Jubilee line extension. The new international station on the rail link at Stratford will provide a valuable interchange with the wide range of existing public transport services radiating from there, giving much improved international access to north and east London, Essex, docklands and the City.

With the permission of the House, I should like to pay tribute to many hon. Friends, especially those from the Newham area, for fighting a long and successful battle to get an international station at Stratford. There were doubters in all parts of the House. I was never regarded as a great enthusiast myself, and it is enormously to my hon. Friends' credit that they have sold the area that sends them to the House as well and as successfully as they have. The right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire mentioned the Under–Secretary of State for National Heritage, my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who, in some respects, is the greatest ham of them all. We appreciate that his new and welcome ministerial duties keep him away this afternoon, but he, too, worked very hard to ensure that the proposals came before us in their current form.

The new station at Stratford will have two further dimensions. First, the rail link is intended to be used by domestic trains from north and east Kent to London, thus improving journey times dramatically when compared to travel via the existing routes. Domestic trains will serve the new station so that passengers from Kent will be able to benefit from the interchange opportunities.

Secondly, the new station will act as a focus for the regeneration of the Stratford area, one of the most deprived parts of London. Under the overall framework of the Thames gateway project, to which reference has already been made, the local authorities—led by the London borough of Newham—are working with local landowners and other interests on the redevelopment of the Stratford rail lands to bring new businesses and new employment opportunities which are so badly needed. The new station will be at the heart of the area.

The right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire mentioned the need for proper public transport links at the new station, especially for buses. I am sure that he will appreciate that the station will have bus and coach set-down and pick-up points well positioned for the station's entrances and exits. Initially, the route to the station will be via the existing access road from Waterden road. Existing bus services could be extended or re-routed to allow for a stop at the station. A full range of services based on the new Stratford bus station will be accessible to passengers using the international station.

The pattern and routing of buses calling at the international station will be determined by development in the area. My hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) will take a close interest in that during the building of the station and associated works to ensure that essential public transport links are provided from the outset so that the majority of passengers using the station can arrive or depart on public transport.

Major infrastructure projects usually have an environmental and human cost. I am delighted that this scheme is an exception. More than 90 per cent. of the land is railway land already earmarked for the rail link project and is some distance from existing residential areas. Construction will be undertaken as part of the overall rail link work, for which the House has already given permission, and will not add significantly to the environmental impact.

That is not to minimise the importance of the 56 objections that have been made, but, under the procedure set out in the Transport and Works Act 1992, those objections should be carefully considered and the promoter hopes that the majority of those objecting will have their fears soothed. The comprehensive environmental protection regime already put in place will also apply to this scheme.

[Mr. Snape]

I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will support the scheme, which has many benefits. Support for the order in the House will be consistent with the expressed will of the past Parliament, which strongly supported the principle of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill in both Houses without a Division. Approval of the order will enable the scheme to go forward for detailed consideration at a public inquiry according to the procedures laid down under the Transport and Works Act.

Those of us who have seen the scheme come to fruition through postponements, cancellations and heartache over the years will be delighted that this is the final piece in this railway jigsaw, to misuse a metaphor. It will enable the great civil engineering project of the channel tunnel to bring proper economic benefits in its wake, as all of us who have been associated with it—as I have been since I was elected to the House—have wanted. Those benefits will come not just to Stratford or to London and the south-east, but to the rest of the United Kingdom. I hope that the House will give that approval without a Division, but, if one is necessary, I hope that we shall have an overwhelming majority in favour.

5.2 pm

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I congratulate the Minister on her appointment. It is a pleasure to see her looking at me with both eyes rather sideways, as used to happen in the last Parliament. I wish her every success and I look forward to debating transport issues with her in the coming months. As the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) said earlier, we have always managed if not to adopt a friendly approach to our debates, at least to stick to the issues rather than concentrating on personalities. I am sure that that will continue.

The Liberal Democrats welcome the order. We are pleased to see significant progress after the many disappointments and postponements that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) referred to. I hope that we can have an assurance that there will be no further delays as the scheme progresses towards completion.

I do not want to take up too much time, because I know that other hon. Members want to contribute to the debate. I should like to address three key issues, to which I hope that the Minister will respond: Stratford station; the north London connection; and public funding.

I asked the Minister about public funding during her speech. I was pleased that she foresaw no further demand on public resources. I hope that she will not be swayed from that view as the scheme progresses.

The development provides significant regeneration opportunities for the area served by Stratford station, with great potential for substantial long-term employment opportunities. We welcome that. There is an expectation in the Department's briefing that the station will encourage greater use of public transport. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East mentioned bus links.

The success of the station depends on the quality of the public transport links. There must be a comprehensive set of bus priority measures. I note that the car park has a capacity of 2,000. There must be opportunities for a park and ride or a kiss and ride scheme. I hope, most importantly, that the Minister will do all that she can to encourage the creation of quality partnerships between the local authorities and the local bus operators so that the public are offered attractive, efficient and affordable bus links to the new international station.

The success of the station also depends on recognising the concerns that the local authorities have already set out. I note that the promoters intend to negotiate and try to resolve those problems, but I urge the Minister to use her influence to ensure that the promoters make every effort to resolve those fears before the public inquiry. If there are still objections when the public inquiry starts, the scheme will be delayed, which is the last thing that we want.

The twin-track connection in north London is a short but vital rail link to join the channel tunnel rail link with the west coast main line. A direct, high-speed connection from continental Europe, beyond the south-east of England to the west midlands, the north-west and beyond offers significant potential for economic development, regeneration and growth in tourism throughout England. I welcome that prospect and will eagerly support it.

A number of issues are germane to achieving those benefits.

Mr. Jamie Cann (Ipswich): Will the hon. Gentleman consider the fact that the North London line is already at capacity? I approve of diverting Eurostar on to it, but we ought to consider another method of getting rail traffic across from the west and the east, to Felixstowe in particular, by opening up a few routes that could be cheaply provided, allowing the project to go ahead much more effectively.

Mr. Chidgey: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments because they demonstrate the need to encourage Railtrack to make the investment desperately needed to expand our rail network now so that our railways properly serve the nation as the spine of our national transport system. The hon. Gentleman's point is very valid and I am sure that the Minister will take it on board.

We should also use the north London connection to encourage freight services through the channel tunnel to the north of England. We should promote freight services on the channel tunnel rail link via the north London connection to the west coast main line. That is vital in getting the important shift of freight from road to rail.

What consideration is the Minister giving to promoting freight trains through the chunnel up to the west midlands and beyond? Will she grasp the opportunity to create the through-working of freight trains from continental Europe, along the channel tunnel rail link and on to the west coast main line to the north-west? Rail freight could be far more competitive with that opportunity. Are the Government pressing the French Government to accommodate through freight train operations from France to the United Kingdom by allowing freight trains to use the French rail network? Such an agreement would make the channel tunnel rail link much more attractive for freight operations.

I return to the connection between the chunnel and the north of England. It is disappointing that Eurostar services to the north have been delayed until later this year. Can the Minister tell us whether the delay has been caused by Railtrack failing to undertake the necessary upgrading of the rail network?

I welcome the potential for improvements to the North London line. The Minister will, however, be well aware that the line has a poor reputation among its customers. Can she assure me that improvements to North London line services are planned? Will there be improvements in reliability and, most importantly, in passenger safety, as part of the proposals?

The key points are how best to develop Stratford station and how best to develop, through the north London connection, the link between the channel tunnel rail line and the west coast main line. I look forward to the Minister's response.

5.12 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): I declare not only a constituency interest, but the fact that I live in the Lea valley and go for walks in the Bully Point nature reserve to which the Minister referred. It is a delightful and tranquil place. Those from Newham who would destroy it are capable of destroying civilisation itself.

The order is part of the fantasy politics of the London borough of Newham. Newham council calls the project "Gateway to the East", but those of us who know the area call it a gateway to hell. Have you ever been to Stratford town centre, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It is an offer that you could certainly refuse.

Every 20 years, Newham council decides to redevelop Stratford town centre in the most environmentally unfriendly fashion. First, the developers remove every blade of grass and every tree, and then they get rid of the human beings. After that, they dig as big a hole as possible, fill it with concrete and put as many cars as possible on it. That is an accurate description of Stratford town centre. When the councillors realise what a ghastly mess they have made of it, they whinge to the Government and say, "Can we redevelop our town centre with more of your money?" That is why we are here today.

I support the speedy building of the channel tunnel rail link, while expressing disgust at the manner in which the route was chosen. Newham council is concerned not so much with the international railway station as with a huge property development which, in 20 years' time, will contain some of the largest, and most soulless and empty office blocks we have ever seen. The council will then whinge again to the Government and ask whether it can redevelop the town centre.

On the question of the number of jobs likely to be created, Newham council and the promoters shame us with what I might describe as perpetual exponential hyperbole. Do you remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the old axiom that there are lies, damn lies and Newham council lies? When the debate about developing the station at Stratford began some years ago, we were told that the development might create 200 or so jobs. The figure then rose to 2,000 and then to 20,000. At one time, it was even said that the number of jobs might touch 100,000. The truth?

The truth is set out in some of the documents before the House. The station's construction over two years will directly create 430 jobs and a further 100 jobs are likely to be created from what is described as "associated induced and indirect expenditure". When those people have gone off to the next building site in London, the station operation at Stratford will employ just 70 people—50 for international services and 20 for domestic services. Station retailing will create 30 jobs and a further 28 jobs will be created from what is described as "associated induced and indirect expenditure". That is not a lot. The job hope is all pie in the sky stuff related to huge fat cat property development at Stratford, and it is part of the hyperbolic statistics for which Newham council and its leader are famed.

My main point in speaking is not to speak ill of Newham council, still less of my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms), who will, I hope, catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend came to my general management committee and got a drubbing from one of our representatives. My main aim is to concentrate on the environmental statement that accompanies the order. For a couple of years, I worked for the Government in urban transport. I can say quite comfortably that the environmental statement is slipshod, shoddy, anti-intellectual and based on unsound methodology. The victims of this appalling piece of work are likely to be the residents of Newham and Hackney.

The only public road access to the station is not through Newham, but via Waterden road in Hackney. It will lead into what is currently a 2,000-space car park, but as the promoters will get 80 acres of land in the area, that could easily turn into a 10,000-space car park. The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) gave it away—my God, what trouble he has created for himself in the House today!—by calling for park and ride facilities.

Both the previous Government and this Government have assured us that the one thing they will not have is park and ride facilities, because that would spew traffic all over south Hackney and through the roads and homes of people who live in Wick ward and Victoria ward, each of which has three Liberal Democrat councillors. Those residents will be pleased to hear that their Liberal Democrat spokesman wants to make their lives a misery for the next 50 years with park and ride schemes. That will be a disaster for Hackney and will lead to far more road building. It will probably lead to the need to start to build dual carriageways to the station.

Mr. Snape: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Sedgemore: No. My hon. Friend made a long speech and I need to be short.

Mr. Snape: I wanted to answer some of my hon. Friend's questions.

Mr. Sedgemore: I have met that one before.

Mr. Snape: You never listen—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order.

Mr. Sedgemore: My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) is getting a bit excited. I know that he is a railway buff and I am keen on railway lines too, but that is no reason for him to think that the lives of people in south Hackney should be destroyed or not properly considered in this House.

Mr. Snape: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Sedgemore: The hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend will not give way.

[Mr. Sedgemore]

The environmental statement does not even consider the effects of the extra traffic on Hackney residents. That is appalling. Worse, it makes no attempt to justify the assumptions used and provides no explanation of how the predicted traffic flow has been derived from those assumptions. There are six people sitting up there. Perhaps they can advise the Minister as to the answers to those questions and explain why assumptions have been made without justification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should know that the only people present here are right hon. and hon. Members.

Mr. Sedgemore: You are quite right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I used to sit up there when I worked in urban planning. That is why I am so excited about the issue.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend made a great success of it, too.

Mr. Sedgemore: Actually, I worked in that Department under a Conservative Government.

It would have been possible to make a number of different assumptions about traffic flow. I can think of at least five. First, there could be more car trips from the west, particularly central London. Secondly, there could be more than nine international trains a day and three trains per hour using the station. Thirdly, more than 50 per cent. of international train passengers might use the station. Fourthly, more than 40 per cent. of international passengers might travel by road and fifthly, more domestic passengers than expected might travel by road. Variation in one or more of those assumptions could change significantly the predicted traffic flows. In fact, the environmental statement makes no reference to any of those possible variations.

Worse, the current proposals make no predictions as to the traffic flows that will result from the associated private developments. That leaves a gigantic black hole in the environmental statement, which refers to very small figures and makes no attempt to justify the assumptions it makes, but when one also considers the private developments and the cars travelling not through Newham, but through Hackney, it is clear that a miserable hell will be created for the people of south Hackney if the associated developments are sufficiently successful for the Minister to claim significant job creation.

I shall not oppose the order, but I believe that the public inquiry should closely examine 10 factors. First is the lack of explanation for the assumptions and conclusions used in the environmental statement concerning traffic and transport. Second is the proposed compulsory acquisition of part of Waterden road. Third is the consequential need to improve the rest of Waterden road up to the Lea interchange and the M11 link. Fourth is the loss of allotments with no compensating proposal for their replacement, on the grounds that such loss of open space cannot be justified without replacement elsewhere.

Fifth—a number of hon. Members have referred to it—is the possible need for additional works on the north London line in the vicinity of the connection and Camden Road station to ensure that international services do not interfere with the operation or expansion of local services to and from Hackney and vice versa.

Sixth is the desirability of ensuring that the proposals for the station allow for the addition of a new surface station on the existing line across the Stratford railway lands to serve their development and the channel tunnel rail link station and further their accessibility by and the promotion of the use of public transport.

Seventh is the desirability of an additional access road from the surrounding road network to the station to enable it to be better served by public road transport, particularly buses. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East for mentioning that.

Eighth is the possible need to limit or reduce the size of the station car parks to discourage travel to the station by road and to encourage access by public transport, but I fear that the hon. Member for Eastleigh has given the game away. The car maniacs are always there and they always win.

Ninth, the gradient of the channel tunnel rail link west of Stratford station should be examined on the grounds that it inhibits the nominated undertaker in fully meeting the undertaking given to Hackney council in the other place concerning the depth of the tunnel beneath Trowbridge estate.

My tenth and final point is the one on which I started—Bully Point. Will Newham really destroy one of the most beautiful nature reserves in the country and will it make my life, living on the River Lea, a complete misery? Surely not.

5.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Coming from a party that has no understanding of internal disputes, I listened with astonishment to the contest that was developing during the speech of the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). I found it significant that, at that moment, the Minister for sport entered the Chamber, no doubt looking for some gladiatorial contest. I hope that he was not disappointed.

I must be one of the two longest-serving members of the group that wanted a station at Stratford. It may be surprising to some hon. Members to learn that I first became interested in Stratford when I was trying to persuade British Rail that the channel tunnel rail link should have been on a different route from the one that was finally chosen, and that Stratford was a manifestly sensible place for a station.

British Rail and its successor, Union Rail, had a wonderful preoccupation with what they both termed an aeroplane on wheels. They felt that any stop between terminuses was a total economic disaster and the idea that trains might pick up passengers was an aberration. I am pleased that, over the long years during which the project has been coming to fruition, there has been a change in the undertaker, which has moved from thinking that passengers who got on anywhere other than the starting point were a nuisance to at least giving the impression that passengers should be picked up at several places. That is progress indeed.

It is my first chance to welcome the Under-Secretary to her responsibilities, and I do so gladly. I very much hope that her Government will continue the work of the

previous Government in trying to ensure that projects of such a size progress rather faster. This one is doing all right. So far, it will have taken only 17 years to reach its projected final date, but the amount of grief that such a time scale causes to large numbers of our constituents while decisions are taken and the blight settles is intolerable. I hope that we can re-establish the all-party parliamentary group on blight, as we were beginning to make progress towards relieving that burden.

I received the information about the order about two days before I saw the newspaper reports that London and Continental Railways' takings from Eurostar were so poor that the company was likely to defer any works and was certainly deferring its flotation. That worried me considerably, so I got in touch with the company.

Yesterday, I had a long meeting with its representatives, who gave me firm assurances that the company is on track for flotation next year. They were confident of finishing the line and making it operational by 2003. They told me that revenue from the Eurostar services, although somewhat disrupted by a French strike two Christmases ago and by the fire in the tunnel last Christmas, are nevertheless sufficient to give them the confidence to go ahead. I wanted to spell that out, as it would be a betrayal of everyone along the route and everyone affected by the proposal if London and Continental Railways was unable to honour those pledges. It gave them to me in the most firm manner.

One of the great advantages of Stratford is that it will allow international passengers to be carried from one end of the United Kingdom into mainland Europe much more effectively than under previous plans. That is admirable. What bothers me a little is that the promoters say that the channel tunnel link will free up capacity on commuter routes. I was gently derided by Conservative Ministers for many years for suggesting that one day the pattern of commuting would change. I cannot believe that the information technology revolution will not eventually have a dramatic effect on patterns of travel to work.

It is interesting that, after those years of derision, British Telecom at least has thought it worth spending a large sum of money on an advertising campaign that points out that it can now provide offices at home for people who currently commute, thereby allowing people to commute either much less often or not at all. I hope that the Government are taking seriously that possibility.

The income repercussions of a marked change in the pattern of commuting will be considerable unless freight is carried on commuter lines. While the channel tunnel rail link may become a profitable venture as a result of the growth of international travel, domestic travel may well become less profitable and commuters may return to the position in which commuters in my area have been for far too long. Commuter services are under-resourced because it is not profitable to resource them. I ask the Minister to take seriously the possibility, indeed probability, that information technology will change the nature of travel to work in the coming years.

I welcome the station at Stratford. It is an eminently necessary and sensible development and, for the life of me, I cannot understand why the previous companies engaged in the operation were so hostile to it.

5.32 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I welcome the way in which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions introduced the debate. The channel tunnel rail link will yield big gains to the nation. As much as £6 billion has been estimated. The construction and operation of Stratford station assigns some of those gains to east London. Jobs, regeneration opportunities and significantly improved transport connections are huge benefits which are very welcome. So the station is supported in principle.

However, the project is not cost-free. There is a downside for neighbouring areas such as mine—Leyton, Leytonstone and Wanstead. That downside, in a word, is traffic. My constituency is already overburdened with it, and any extra traffic problems must be considered and ameliorated at an early stage.

The M11 link road remains a bitter bone of contention in Leyton and Wanstead. Promises of improvements for local roads as a result of its construction, which many did not believe at the time of the public inquiries, are already being withdrawn. Rat runs continue in local streets. Traffic delays and congestion on the link road itself due to greater car usage than was originally suggested are acknowledged even before it is built. Leytonstone High road continues to be a major trunk road, even though its part-pedestrianisation was originally mooted. Those broken promises are placing extra burdens on the community.

Traffic associated with Stratford station will upset still further the traffic predictions for the M11 link road. The M11-Lee interchange has been designed to be in balance with the local road network and thereby prevent additional traffic from entering Hackney and Tower Hamlets in peak periods, when the intersection will run at its design capacity. The environmental assessment predicted an extra 400 vehicles per hour—a 42 per cent. increase—on Waterden road in the morning peak. That will lead to huge problems not only in Hackney and on Waterden road but further back down the link road in Leyton and Wanstead.

There will inevitably be pressure to improve the capacity of Waterden road, but that will also mean higher levels of traffic passing through Leyton and Wanstead, including local streets. That will negate the traffic relief that the M11 link road is supposed to provide, especially in Grove Green road, Leytonstone High road and Cambridge Park. My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) made a good point when he said that yet more traffic from the private developments which would follow from the station should be taken into account.

London and Continental Railways, together with the Department of Transport and the relevant boroughs, must make proposals to remedy the problems.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend makes a similar point to the one to which I would have replied had I been allowed to do so by my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). I appreciate the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead makes the point.

Of course traffic is a problem. The promoters have given an assurance that there will be both price and physical constraints on commuter traffic to prevent people from railheading in the way that the spokesman for the Liberal party, the hon. Member for Eastleigh

[Mr. Snape]

(Mr. Chidgey), favoured. So while my hon. Friend's fears are obvious and can be appreciated, they are not fears which can be generated by the order before the House tonight.

Mr. Cohen: I accept that the order will go to a public inquiry. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those assurances on behalf of the promoters, but boroughs such as mine will want a great deal more than has so far been suggested to deal with the traffic. I hope that my hon. Friend will relay that message to London and Continental Railways.

The environmental statement proposes up to 2,000 car parking spaces in association with the station. No-where in the statement is there justification for that number of spaces. London and Continental Railways should either justify or reduce the number of spaces. Areas surrounding the station such as Leyton and Leytonstone should not be turned into large car parks—certainly not without enormous ameliorating environmental compensation for the area.

Furthermore, there should not be unrestrained increased traffic on Leyton and Leytonstone roads to service Stratford station. Traffic levels on roads into the station need to be kept to the minimum. One way of achieving that is to increase public transport provision into the station. For example, there should be rail services northwards along the Lee valley. Under no circumstances should there be a new road along the Lee valley.

Road access to the station needs to be tightly constrained in order to reduce the damaging environmental effects of traffic in neighbouring areas. That has not yet been properly taken into account.

London and Continental Railways stands to profit a great deal from the Stratford development and the channel tunnel rail link as a whole, but as I have made clear, it is not cost-free. In this private-public partnership, which can benefit all, the cost of dealing with the disbenefits must be met. I believe that they should be met by London and Continental Railways.

5.38 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I rise with some trepidation, having heard that some hon. Members on both sides of the House have been fighting these battles for a decade or more. My predecessor was in the front line of many of those battles. He served as Member of Parliament for Ashford for more than 20 years, and one of his most earnest wishes was that the channel tunnel rail link project be built during the equivalent amount of time that he expected me to serve in the House.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for National Heritage (Mr. Tony Banks): We shall have to move fast, then.

Mr. Green: We may have to improve on the speed so far, I suspect.

I join other hon. Members in supporting the works proposed by the Minister. The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) gave one of the most negative expressions of support that I have heard for any proposition.

I want to interject a reservation which will be important for the Stratford area. I draw to the attention of hon. Members with constituencies near Stratford our experience in Ashford, which is further down the process because a station has already been built. Our experience of the disturbance, the effects on traffic and so on will prove relevant to Stratford. By and large, it has been positive.

All reservations about the project must be weighed against the fact that the project should be regarded as an enormous asset, both to those areas of the country through which it runs, and nationally. Inward investment and economic regeneration have come much faster to Ashford because of the existence of the international passenger station. The prospect of a high-speed rail link will not only improve transport links to the continent but allow faster commuting to London and beyond.

However, there has been, and still is, an unfortunate degree of uncertainty about timing and starting dates that has had a severe effect on people whose homes and businesses lie in the way of the link and who will have to move when it is built. One of the things that I have discovered in the past few weeks is that many of those people are disturbed by what they perceive as a lack of openness on the part of London and Continental in giving straight answers to straight questions.

We all know that many questions simply cannot be answered at this stage—no one is being unrealistic about that—but I ask the Minister to use her good offices to urge London and Continental to be more open with people, whether in Ashford or Stratford, who are directly affected by the line's construction and the blight that it already causes, by giving more detailed information about dates and projected building times than it has up to now. I hope that London and Continental will regard the passing of the order as clearing a vital hurdle, and that it will use it as a chance to clear up the uncertainties about the timing of construction work that affects so many people, and that will soon affect more in the Stratford area.

I hope that the flotation will go ahead as fast as possible. I was reassured when my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) said that London and Continental hopes to proceed with flotation next year and then proceed to other building works. I hope even more strongly that firm dates can be attached to the various stages of the project. I congratulate those who have seen the project through so far, and I assure hon. Members that Stratford and the whole east London area will benefit as Ashford is already benefiting. However, the passage of this order must be used to enable regeneration to be accompanied by greater certainty for the business and home owners who are most affected by the line. I appeal to the Minister to use her powers to ensure that London and Continental changes its culture and becomes more open to those people.

5.44 pm

Mr. Stephen Timms (East Ham): I am pleased to have the opportunity to support the motion strongly. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister opened the debate, because of her long interest in the project. I commend the role of London and Continental Railways because, as other hon. Members explained, this has been a long saga. The contribution of London and Continental has been

imaginative since its participation began. I have also been impressed by the way in which it has entered into discussions with local community organisations about ways of making sure that the many jobs that will be generated by the construction project will be filled, as far as possible, by unemployed people from Newham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets.

I was chair of the planning committee on Newham council when British Rail first suggested that there might be an international station at Stratford. Having aired it, British Rail quickly stepped back from the proposal, but when I briefed colleagues on Newham council about the idea, they were immediately enthusiastic because of the chance it gives to regenerate east London and to bring back economic activity and jobs to an area where thousands from Newham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets used to gain their livelihood and where today only a handful do. We want economic activity to be brought back.

Mr. Charles Clarke (Norwich, South): Does my hon. Friend accept that not only will east London's economic regeneration benefit from the station but that Norwich and East Anglia will benefit from the tremendously improved travel times to London and Europe that will bring us jobs and prosperity? That is why we strongly support the project and the order.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that important point. The support of East Anglia for the project was an important factor in the campaign's success. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) in his place.

It was while I was leader of Newham council that I first became aware of the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). Most of us understand how to raise issues with colleagues when policies cause concern, perhaps by a letter, telephone call or meeting. He chose first to draw attention to his views through his column in the *Hackney Gazette*, where he described me as a lunatic. I note that he has been consistent in his views to this day.

Newham council's campaign for the station at Stratford has been extraordinarily popular. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) is in his place. He is in continual contact with the people of the area because he lives there. Whenever opinion in Stratford has been tested, there has been overwhelming support for bringing jobs back to the Stratford railway lands through this project.

The campaign brought together in a remarkable way the local community, local community organisations, the local authority and local businesses. For that reason, I was especially pleased that the Deputy Prime Minister, in his important speech last week outlining the new Government's policies on regenerating our cities, picked out the Stratford Promoters Group as an example of successful partnership.

Speaking in Tower Hamlets, he referred to the group as a "spectacular success", and said:

> "Let me give you one example from the neighbouring Borough of Newham. Some years ago, the local authority and other local partners brought together the Stratford Promoters Group which lobbied hard and effectively for an International Passenger Station at Stratford . . . That is the sort of partnership I want to see."

He was right to say that it has been a very successful partnership with the local community, and I am delighted that it has led to the success that we are noting today by supporting the order.

There are many people whose role in the campaign has been mentioned. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), who speaks from the Opposition Front Bench. He has taken an interest in the project for a long time. He was much more supportive when in office than some of his predecessors, who were positively unwilling to support the station proposal.

I pay tribute also to the members of the Select Committee who considered the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Bill as it then was, including my hon. Friends the Members for Ipswich (Mr. Cann) and for Pendle (Mr. Prentice). Their conclusion that the station at Stratford was in the national interest was an important step towards the Government's agreement that there should be a station at Stratford.

It is important in east London to bring back economic activity and jobs into an area from which they have long disappeared, in huge numbers. I think that Stratford will be the London hub for the future national high-speed railway network. The Stratford railway land is a 120-hectare site that is important strategically for the future of east London. The international station will have a vital role in attracting development to Stratford, Newham and the Thames gateway as a whole.

Stratford will underpin the importance of London as a world city. We are talking not of a local issue but one that is regional, Londonwide and national. We expect that when the rail land is fully developed, there will be about 15,000 jobs on site. The project will make a huge contribution to the regeneration of east London and to raising the level of prosperity in the area generally. It is a contribution that is very much needed.

I make a request through my hon. Friend the Minister to London and Continental Railways—that it should be willing to work with the local authority and potential development partners to ensure that the plan for the station site and the construction of the station building is of a sort that leads to successful long-term development of an enormous site.

I well understand the pressures that London and Continental is now under, but it is in its interests and those of the local communities that we should ensure that the development of the station itself contributes to the wider development of the site and the prosperity that results from that.

The station will be a great step forward for east London, but there are some important environmental issues still to be resolved. There is no threat to Bully Point. I do not expect to see a 2,000-space car park on that site. These, however, are matters that need to be resolved in discussions between the local authorities, London and Continental and potential developers, and they can be resolved. Let no one in the House underestimate the immense popularity in the locality of the proposal and the widespread support that there is for it.

5.53 pm

Ms Glenda Jackson: With the leave of the House, I shall respond to the debate. It seems that there is a feeling on both sides of the Chamber that the order should be passed. I hope that that will be the outcome of the debate.

The right hon. Member for North–West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), who speaks for the Opposition from the Front Bench, said, if I might paraphrase, that he saw the usual faces in the Chamber for the debate although they seem to represent different areas. The right hon. Gentleman, of course, has a brand-new constituency.

[Ms Glenda Jackson]

I shall link the issue of compensation that the right hon. Gentleman raised with the questions put by the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid–Kent (Mr. Rowe) on planning procedures and blight. Before doing so, however, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome to me.

The Government expect the final report of the interdepartmental group on blight later this year. The draft scheme on redress, which was put to the Select Committee on the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration shortly before the general election, is being considered as to the best way forward.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) for his contribution to the debate, which was especially helpful to the House in detailing what is so important about the order. Without the order, there can be no next step. My hon. Friend highlighted the importance of the development that we are discussing, stemming from his lifelong commitment to and knowledge of the importance of railways. He highlighted, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes), in an intervention, the importance of the scheme going forward, not least for employment opportunities. The point was highlighted also in another intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke).

The hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) seemed mostly to be concerned about issues that in essence, if the order is accepted, will be the responsibility of the public inquiry. That theme ran through many of the contributions of hon. Members. Everyone in this place shares concern over environmental issues. There is little doubt, should the order be accepted, that the public inquiry will examine these issues in no small detail.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh raised also the issue of freight and the development of it. In essence, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, the channel tunnel rail link is a high-speed link to carry passengers. If, however, the order is accepted and if the links are made, along with the construction of the station, existing lines will be released. Freight will be able to be carried on the channel tunnel rail link and there will be additional capacity on existing lines.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), in a typically robust contribution, claimed that he had not come to the Chamber to speak ill of Newham council. May I say to him that he could have fooled me? However, my hon. Friend was mostly concerned about the environment, which is an issue more properly examined at the public inquiry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) talked also of environmental concerns. He, too, said that we must move away from an over-dependency on car usage, and that is central to the Government's thinking. That can be most speedily progressed by the creation of a properly integrated public transport system.

The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) took up, in a sense, one of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms). I have no doubt that London and Continental will pick it up and act on it with some speed. It is important for the speedy development of projects such as the one that we are discussing that there be great openness between the developer and the local communities. Should the order be passed, should the report of the public inquiry advise and should the Secretary of State so order, there must be close working between the developer and the communities.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham. I am delighted to see that the Under–Secretary of State for National Heritage, my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), is sitting next to my hon. Friend. I had little doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham would be here in spirit, and it is more of a pleasure to see that he is here in the flesh, albeit that he has not chosen to delight the Chamber with a contribution to the debate.

We pay tribute to the work, the dedication and the energy which my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham has brought consistently to the project that we are considering. He has never flagged or failed in his belief in the project and the benefits that it can bring to his constituency, to London and to the country as a whole.

If I have not answered any questions raised this afternoon, I shall write to hon. Members. I remind the House that agreeing to the order will not be decisive but it will enable an application to go forward to a public inquiry, with a clear endorsement, assuming that it is agreed in another place, in principle by Parliament. I commend the application to the House and invite Members to approve the order.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, pursuant to section 9(4) of the Transport and Works Act 1992 ("the Act") as applied by section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996, approves the following proposals, contained in an application for an Order submitted under section 6 of the Act by Eurostar (UK) Limited on 23rd January 1997 and entitled The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (Stratford Station and Subsidiary Works) Order, for

(1) The construction, maintenance and operation of—

(i) in the London Borough of Hackney and Newham, a station at Stratford for international and domestic services on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link with vehicular parking and other facilities in connection therewith; railways comprising down and up lines to serve international and domestic platforms at that station; and a station access road off Waterden Road, including a bridge over the River Lea;

(ii) in the London Borough of Hackney, a realignment and improvement of Waterden Road;

(iii) in the London Borough of Newham, a subway at the existing suburban Stratford station with a pedestrian link to the new station; and

(iv) in the London Boroughs of Camden and Islington, railways near St. Pancras to provide access between the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and the West Coast Main Line by means of a connection to the North London Line.

(2) The authorisation of works ancillary to the above-mentioned works, including the stopping-up of York Way in the London Boroughs of Camden and Islington, the making of a means of access to and from that road and interference with waterways.

(3) The compulsory acquisition or use of land or rights in land for the intended works; compensation for this and for the injurious affection of land; and the compulsory use of subsoil.

Northern Ireland

5.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam): I beg to move,

That the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996 (Amendment) Order 1997 (S.I., 1997, No. 1403), which was laid before this House on 3rd June, be approved.

The order proscribed the Loyalist Volunteer Force and the Continuity Army Council. It came into effect on 4 June and is subject to approval within 40 sitting days.

Let me begin by giving some background to those two organisations. The Loyalist Volunteer Force is a breakaway group of the Ulster Volunteer Force. The Continuity Army Council is a name generally used to describe the military wing of Republican Sinn Fein.

We do not take decisions concerning the proscription of any organisation lightly. It might be helpful, therefore, if I put the proscription of these two organisations in the context of a number of appalling acts of terrorism for which they have claimed responsibility.

In March this year, the LVF set fire to the tourist information centres in Banbridge and Newcastle. It was also responsible for arson attacks on the Irish heritage centre in Donaghmore, a school in Newry and Sinn Fein offices in Dungannon. It also in the same month claimed responsibility for planting a bomb in Dundalk town centre. In April, it claimed responsibility for an arson attack on a public house in Aghalee, and in May it claimed responsibility for the murder of 62-year-old Sean Brown, a local member of the Gaelic Athletic Association club. He had been abducted from the club and his body was found beside his burnt-out car in Randalstown. The reason given: loyalist parades being re-routed.

With regard to the CAC, in July 1996, it claimed responsibility for a car bomb left outside Killyhevlin hotel in Enniskillen, which destroyed much of the building. In September, it claimed responsibility for a bomb abandoned in a stolen car in Belfast city centre. In May, the CAC was believed to be responsible for a car bomb in Belfast, which detonated prematurely, injuring an occupant of the car.

Taking into account acts such as those, and judging carefully all the available information against the statutory criterion for proscription—being concerned in terrorism or in promoting or encouraging it—I concluded that, in both cases, that criterion had been fully met. Once that judgment had been made, I took prompt action, as any organisations that are constituted for the primary purpose of carrying out criminal terrorist acts can have no legitimate place in our society.

As a result of the order, it is an offence to be a member of the LVF or CAC from the time that they became proscribed organisations. It is also an offence to solicit or invite any person to become a member of those organisations or to assist in the holding of a meeting to support or further their activities.

Proscription cannot prevent terrorist acts, but it does make life harder for the terrorists. Most important of all, it gives a clear statement of the Government's and society's abhorrence of those organisations. Those who put themselves above the law must expect the consequences. Those crimes serve only to exacerbate divisions and mistrust in Northern Ireland society. Proscription reinforces the Government's commitment to protect all the citizens of Northern Ireland.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Is it not the case that, apart from all else, members of the LVF have been and remain deeply implicated in the disgraceful, violent picketing of the small Catholic church at Harryville?

Marjorie Mowlam: Yes, there is evidence to suggest that that is the case. I join my hon. Friend and all hon. Members in condemning the sectarian bigotry that we see every weekend at Harryville Catholic church, where attempts have been made to stop people entering, showing their faith and being able to participate in church services. It is an example of how the tensions and the sectarianism are surfacing again in the run-up to the marching season. I join my hon. Friend wholeheartedly in condemning what has been happening there.

We hope that the proscription of the LVF and the CAC will have some effect in showing that we as a House of Commons do not give any credence to such behaviour, and that we shall work in the weeks and months ahead to do all we can to build a society that is based on peace, prosperity and reconciliation for all sides of the community.

6.4 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): The Opposition support the order. We accept that the Secretary of State has shown that there is sufficient information to justify the proscribing of the two groups, which is obviously not a light matter; the decision has not been lightly taken. She gave us a list of the acts that appear to have been committed by both groups, on both sides of the sectarian spectrum, interestingly. The Opposition are satisfied that she had every justification for acting to proscribe them.

As the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) reminded the Secretary of State, it is not just straightforward acts of violence that are carried out by such groups. As he said, we have seen the disgraceful behaviour at Harryville. We have seen other sectarian acts on the other side in relation to the burning of Orange halls and so on, all of which strike directly at the deep rights of individuals, such as the right to worship. It is absolutely correct that we should condemn wholeheartedly those who try to disrupt those basic rights, for which many people's ancestors—on both sides of the divide—died. They are precious rights, and we should certainly take a strong and condemnatory view of those who seek to disrupt them.

The reasons for such proscription must be twofold: first, to bring to bear on such organisations and their members the full force of criminal law, to make it more difficult for them to pursue their nefarious activities; and, secondly, to show beyond doubt the implacable hostility with which a democratic society regards those who systematically seek to use violence in pursuit of political ends. Those reasons for proscription are different, but they relate to the way in which society conducts itself, and it is right that, in those circumstances, proscription is used.

The emergence of those two groups may have been by design, in order to provide cover for acts of terrorism outwith the recognised structures of the IRA or the

[Mr. Michael Ancram]

Combined Loyalist Military Command, or it may have been caused by disgruntled breakaways from within those organisations. Either way, I believe that it is right that the trap door of proscription should now be closed on them.

Being sanguine—I think that the Secretary of State recognised this—I do not believe that this act alone will lead to a flood of convictions for membership, or, indeed, to the disbandment of those groupings. The history of previous proscriptions does not give great grounds for over-optimism, particularly in relation to the difficulties of securing sufficient evidence to make charges stick. We all know of the intimidation that is brought to bear on those who on occasion show sufficient courage to give evidence against others in their community for membership of proscribed groups. It is one of those difficult areas where the intention of the order may not in practice turn out to be quite as achievable as we would hope.

I hope that I shall be proved wrong, but history suggests that we should not put too much store by the effectiveness of criminal conviction that might follow such an order. None the less, the order gives an important message and is a positive step. In that context, it is worth reminding ourselves that there are other proscribed groups on the loyalist and the republican side, the most highly organised of which is the Provisional IRA, whose political wing, which is not proscribed, is Sinn Fein.

I mention that because, in the pursuit of peace over the years, that fact has on occasion become somewhat blurred in the minds and mouths of certain commentators and observers, encouraged sometimes by the romanticisation and glorification of those movements on the cinema screen. Just as these two groups are being proscribed by the order because they are terrorist groups, so, we must never forget, is the Provisional IRA. It is an organisation designed and committed to achieve its political objectives through the use of violence, murder, injury and destruction. It must continue to be pursued with the full vigour of the law, just as the two groups proscribed today will be until they mend their ways.

Dr. Godman: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the romanticisation of terrorist organisations in films and plays, but we should also remember the romanticisation of such people in newspapers elsewhere in the world. When I was in Australia at Christmas, I was appalled to read of events in Northern Ireland and to see terrorists described in broadsheets, not tabloids, as guerrillas. I made my views known to some journalists whom I met when I was there.

Mr. Ancram: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Those of us who have been involved in Northern Ireland see a very different side than is often portrayed, as he says, in newspapers and films. We are talking about not guerrillas or freedom fighters, but people who kill, maim, destroy, injure and create devastation to families and communities in pursuit of political objectives, and there is nothing glorious or romantic about that. It is right, when considering the proscription of the two groups today, that we recognise that that same definition applies to the Provisional IRA and to the proscribed organisations within the Combined Loyalist Military Command as well.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): What impact does proscription have on the media who broadcast the words of proscribed groups, saying that they have had a coded message, and at the same time give publicity to those who put hoods on themselves? That does not disguise their body language or their speech. Surely proscription should at least make the media accountable to the law as well.

Mr. Ancram: I am not sure that it is necessarily wise to try to restrict the media by law on occasions such as this, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point, and I hope that the media will recognise the responsibility they bear in this area, and the fact that, if they set out to portray acts of horror and terror as anything other than that, they are themselves helping to create a myth which is destructive to the process in which the Secretary of State and others are involved in trying to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

It is for that reason—we must also look at the matter in this context—that it is right that Sinn Fein, as the political wing of a proscribed organisation, cannot be admitted to the talks process until a genuine and unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire by the Provisional IRA is again in place. That is why the judgment of that ceasefire has to be based on more than just words. Actions will be just as important, as will be the cessation of actions, because, in judging whether a proscribed organisation such as the Provisional IRA is genuine in a ceasefire, it is right that we look to see whether it is still doing things that are inconsistent with a ceasefire. Those which were identified last November, which I understand are still those that the Secretary of State would consider, include continued surveillance, continued targeting and the continued development of weapons, which, in terms of a proscribed terrorist outfit, are simply inconsistent with any declaration of a ceasefire.

Sinn Fein is, of its nature, implicated by association in the violence of the IRA, and no amount of counter-protestation by its arch-propagandists can distort that fact. That is why it is right that Sinn Fein must show a commitment to exclusively peaceful methods and adherence to democratic principles before it can be included in the democratic process.

I can assure the Secretary of State that in the—currently, I have to say—unlikely event of a ceasefire, the Opposition will support her in the most vigorous examination of the words and actions during any ceasefire in order to be satisfied that they show a genuine move away from terrorist violence as a means of seeking to achieve political objectives. Without such vigorous examination and assessment, the confidence to allow a fully inclusive process of talks to prosper simply would not exist.

The order is introduced at a time of great uncertainty and, I think it is right to say, tension in Northern Ireland, when recent acts of violence on all sides, including yesterday's vicious assassination, have given rise to raw sensitivities about the present and apprehension about the future. The order will give some assurance of the Government's attitude to fringe sectarian terrorism, and for that reason I welcome it.

I am sure that the right hon. Lady will agree that such determination is all the better for being balanced and even-handed. She will know the importance of a balanced approach throughout the work that she is currently undertaking, and I hope that she will bear that in mind in

her future consideration of other aspects of what she is doing, such as consideration of the North report and her attitude towards the future of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

It is essential that all parts of the community have confidence at this time that their position, traditions and safeguards are not being unilaterally undermined. I think that the Secretary of State agreed with me yesterday at Question Time on the importance of dialogue and agreement in moving forward. I trust that she will show that in practice in dealing with the thorny issues that confront her because, at the end of the day, confidence building depends on consultation and trust.

To confirm the benefit of the order, I hope that the Secretary of State will take the earliest opportunity to impress upon the new Government in Dublin that confidence will be created and retained only by an even approach to both parts of the community in Northern Ireland, and that any undue indication of sympathy towards the republican cause will undermine the efforts that she must be making to assure the people of Northern Ireland that the political process in which she is involved, and her fight against terrorism, are reasons for confidence rather than fear. She deserves the understanding and co-operation of the Irish Government in that regard.

The Opposition welcome the order. We expect with confidence to see it accompanied by other Government actions consistent with a determination to eradicate the scourge of terrorism wherever it occurs in Northern Ireland and, in that respect, the Secretary of State will have our support.

6.16 pm

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): To add to my intervention in the speech of the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), no one who engages in violent activities against a Government in a parliamentary democracy can legitimately be described as a guerrilla. Journalists elsewhere in the world who do that are guilty of the worst kind of romanticism and sloppy, badly researched journalism.

I welcome the order. The right hon. Member for Devizes may be right when he says that such a measure may not lead to any increase in the number of successful prosecutions for violent behaviour. Nevertheless, for a Secretary of State who has been in office for just five weeks, it is in a plain way a strong declaration of intent, and I compliment her on that.

I support what the right hon. Member for Devizes said when he talked about the dreadful behaviour of those who have engaged in seeking to harass—and worse—ordinary people whose only aim was to attend mass at that small church in Harryville. Similarly, the arsonists who have fired Orange halls must be condemned in an identical manner.

The order is a declaration of intent which I welcome, as, I am sure, will ordinary people in the two communities in Northern Ireland.

6.18 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I begin by offering apologies on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis), who had intended to take part in the debate but was unable to do so because of difficulties in obtaining a flight from Belfast.

The Secretary of State's decision to proscribe the CAC and the LVF was almost certainly inevitable in view of the actions of both bodies, assuming that distinct bodies operate under those names; sometimes one is never entirely sure. Although proscription may not be as effective as one would like, it is necessary in order to show the community's abhorrence of terrorist actions. Consequently, we support the proscription, because it has become inevitable.

The Continuity Army Council has been a problem for some time, as shown by the litany of events that the Secretary of State mentioned, which go back to the major car bomb in Enniskillen in 1996. It is somewhat surprising that that organisation was not proscribed sooner.

The Loyalist Volunteer Force seems to be composed of dissident elements of the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association. One cannot be absolutely sure, but the impression one gets is that elements within those organisations who were opposed to the loyalist ceasefire have drifted away from their parent organisations and have been engaged in terrorist activity of their own. That that has happened is to be condemned. It has tended to undermine the integrity of the loyalist ceasefire, which is a matter of considerable regret.

One of the few positive aspects of security in Northern Ireland in the past year is the fact that the loyalist ceasefire has been sustained, albeit with some difficulty. People in those organisations who moved to the position of being opposed to the loyalist ceasefire have made a serious mistake. I hope that, even at this stage, those who have been engaged in such activity will realise how foolish it is. Loyalist violence at this stage simply lets the IRA off the hook. It is completely counter-productive, and is quite wrong. Any loyalist who is currently engaged in violent activity should do some hard thinking about whom they are actually helping.

The Secretary of State mentioned the consequences of proscription, such as prosecution for membership of such organisations. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) referred to the difficulty of making such charges stick. That is part of the general problem of prosecuting people for terrorist offences. Why has not more progress been made on the development of a proper, coherent witness encouragement and protection scheme? Some action has been taken on the protection side, but why has more not been done to develop a proper witness encouragement scheme? For years, the RUC has argued that such a scheme is needed. It is a pity that more has not been done about that.

Proscription leads to a number of remedies in regard to fund raising on behalf of proscribed organisations. That is very important. There has been some success on that front, but not enough. We should target the fund-raising activities of the organisations that have just been proscribed, particularly the Loyalist Volunteer Force, which is engaged in racketeering. Some people suggest that racketeering is given a greater priority than the actions in which it claims to be engaged. Close attention should be paid to that, because, by virtue of the proscription, authorities will have the power to investigate racketeering. One hopes that some positive consequences will come from that.

As the right hon. Member for Devizes said, the greatest security threat is still the IRA. It was on a go-slow during the various elections: the election in the Irish Republic,

[Mr. David Trimble]

the local government elections in Northern Ireland and the general election. However, the threat is still there. In some respects, the threat is just as high and just as great as ever it was, and people should not be complacent. Vigorous action by the security forces against all proscribed organisations is clearly needed. There is still a general belief in the community that that vigour is not being applied, and that a degree of restraint is still being exercised over the police, the Army and the intelligence services for political reasons because of the so-called peace process. I hope that the Minister of State will make it clear that no such restraint is being applied, and that vigorous action will be taken against all proscribed organisations. We may then see the consequences of that.

People in Northern Ireland were greatly encouraged by the security forces' success against IRA activists in South Armagh a month or two ago. That was noted and deeply appreciated: during the election campaign, many people in my constituency commented positively on that. But it seems to have been an isolated success. I hope that the Government will give the police, the Army and the intelligence services every encouragement to repeat that success, because it is very much needed.

There is no doubt that the IRA will try during the summer to do what it can to destabilise society in Northern Ireland. At the secret meeting of Sinn Fein in the Irish Republic six months ago, Gerry Adams boasted about what it had achieved last summer. He told his adherents that what had happened in Drumcree was no accident, but was the work of his activists over several years. There is no doubt that he and his associates will try to do the same this summer. That is causing tension in the community, and it is not helped by the fact that morale in the RUC is poor. That poor morale is not improved by the comments about so-called police reform, which have not been fully explained to the police or the community. Something must done on those fronts as well.

Proscription is inevitable. We support the order, and we hope that the Government will proceed from this point to ensure that vigorous action is taken against all proscribed organisations.

6.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I welcomed the arrival of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996, and I strongly supported it during its passage through the House, as I supported previous emergency provisions Acts. In my judgment, the powers and provisions of the successive Acts have been and remain essential, and the Secretary of State's action today confirms that. More to the point, the people who make use of those powers and provisions have consistently reported that they are helpful and necessary. The time certainly is not right to abandon them, as the Secretary of State's tabling of this amendment order and the situation on the ground in Northern Ireland confirm.

The amendment order is brief and modest, but, notwithstanding its brevity and modesty, I welcome and support it. The proscribing of organisations may not be the ultimate weapon in the fight against terrorists, but it is a useful adjunct. In some circumstances, it can be a means of securing convictions, although not as frequently as many of us would like. It certainly sends out the right message that there is no lawful place in a free, democratic society for organisations that believe that violence is a legitimate means of pursuing political objectives.

I have no doubt that the two named organisations deservedly qualify for proscription. Their reported actions show that, and I dare say that intelligence sources also provide further good reasons for their proscription. I applaud the Secretary of State's prompt and decisive action.

When the present Secretary of State was shadow Secretary of State, she sometimes described her position on policy issues as "constructive criticism." I often felt that "constructive criticism" was a euphemism for "opposing politely". Nevertheless, I believe that the Government of the day appreciated her approach, and I shall try to follow her example.

Obviously, this is not the occasion for a wide debate on emergency provisions Acts or on the Government's overall intentions with regard to anti-terrorist legislation. However, it is worth putting down in utmost brevity some markers to which, no doubt, we shall return on future occasions.

The first marker that I want to put down is a bit complicated. It relates to the EPA and the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. I may be mistaken, but in the final days of the previous Parliament, I formed the impression that Labour Members might be thinking in terms of moving beyond the Lloyd review. I based that understanding on the speech of the present Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) when we last debated EPA matters on 19 March. He said then:

> "Lord Lloyd . . . said that many of the procedural provisions in the Emergency Provisions Acts might have taken a different form given the existence of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. He also said that once lasting peace had been established in Northern Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom there would be no need for separate Acts: one would suffice."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1997; Vol. 292, c. 1016.]

I hope that, in their deliberations, the Government will not lose sight of Lord Lloyd's all-important qualification. In his judgment, the need for separate Acts remains unless there is lasting peace. That, in itself, demands a considerable passage of time after a ceasefire, or we will not know that that ceasefire is lasting.

When Lord Lloyd referred to separate Acts, did he not have in mind the EPA and PTA, not the EPA and the 1988 order, as the present Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland seemed to think was the case? In either event, Lord Lloyd warned against streamlining or amalgamating legislation unless there was lasting peace, and I believe that it would be unwise to overlook that.

My second marker relates to the Diplock courts. Here again, I hope that the Government will not act too hastily. I do not think that the essential issue is whether to contract in or out of a Diplock court system; I cannot see that that really matters. Nor should it be argued—as it sometimes is—that the Diplock court system is a form of inferior justice. The hon. and learned Member for North Down (Mr. McCartney) made that point persuasively in the Second Reading debate on 19 February last year.

Surely the essential issue is whether Diplock courts are still needed—and they are: we cannot yet dispense with them. Deeply though we may regret it, the threat

of intimidation, or worse, for jurors or witnesses, is as great as ever. To provide protection would be extremely difficult in practical terms and would almost certainly be cost-prohibitive, in view of the number of people who would need to be protected and the length of time for which they would have to be protected. I hope that the Government will not rush in and precipitately curtail the Diplock system.

For the sake of brevity, I shall refer to the third marker only in passing. It relates to the silent video recording of questioning in the holding centres. The arguments about whether the right balance has been maintained, and about whether we are going too far or not far enough, are well rehearsed, but I feel that silent video recording should be given a reasonable trial. That has not yet happened, and it should before any change is seriously considered.

My fourth marker relates to detention orders. Hon. Members have made their hostility to such orders very clear and the arithmetic of the House is such that, if they so decide, they can proceed. I shall say only that if they seek to remove that lapsed power from our anti-terrorist legislation, I do not think that I will be alone on the Opposition Benches in arguing as persuasively as possible that it would be a dreadful mistake. Tragically, the security position in Northern Ireland demands and justifies emergency provisions and the PTA. That is the reality, which the tabling of the order confirms.

I hope that the Secretary of State has fully grasped one dimension of the security situation in the Province, on which the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) commented. A security crisis looms in Northern Ireland today and there is a real danger that it could assume horrific proportions.

Demonstrably, since 1992—and probably some time before that—a key objective in the Provisionals' overall strategy has been the orchestration of confrontation between Unionists and the British state. The Orange Order marches provide the primary vehicle for achieving that, and all the signs suggest that they are succeeding. The crisis will be compounded if the Government unwittingly play into the hands of the Provisionals. With the height of the marching season approaching and tension in the Province rising, the RUC has a pivotal role to play, and the morale of the RUC is a vital consideration.

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Should the hon. Member not confine his remarks to the order that we are discussing?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): The terms of the order are fairly narrow, concerning two specific organisations. Perhaps the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) will confine his remarks to that order.

Mr. Hunter: In recent weeks, the two organisations that have been proscribed today have been instrumental in creating disorder in Northern Ireland. My point is that it is through the marching season, and the marches in particular, that those who seek to disrupt order in Northern Ireland are working. That is my argument in support of proscription. I hope that the Secretary of State fully appreciates how dangerous the position is, and that he will find means to restore morale within the RUC.

6.36 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): We have had a brief but constructive debate. I think it appropriate to acknowledge what all right hon. and hon. Members have said in condemnation of paramilitary violence and sectarianism, from whatever quarter it comes. It is clear that the House is unanimous in that condemnation.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) asked why we had not proscribed the organisations before. The decisions that we are making tonight must be based on reliable evidence relating to the organisations as a whole, rather than assertions, suspicions or even the conviction of individual members for criminal offences. The evidence available at any particular time has been kept under review, but it is now such that we believe that the Loyalist Volunteer Force and the Continuity Army Council are organisations which deserve proscription.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) made many telling points about other groups that have already been proscribed. He said that proscription of itself would not achieve the removal of those groups from the face of Northern Ireland society, and the evidence tells us just that. Clearly, the best and most effective proscription will occur when those groups listen to what all decent, right-thinking people want for Northern Ireland—when they respond to what the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland want for their society.

The right hon. Gentleman also sought assurances that the Government, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, would seek to ensure that all sectors of this deeply divided community were dealt with sensitively. He made some telling points. I think that, overall, he recognised that that was indeed the way in which the Government and my right hon. Friend had proceeded during the weeks in which we have been in office, and that we would continue to proceed on the same basis.

The right hon. Gentleman rightly commented on the need for the new Dublin Government to adopt an even-handed approach to the position in Northern Ireland. We worked well with the last Dublin Government and we look forward to building a constructive and progressive relationship with the new Government and those who will speak for them in the peace talks. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept those assurances.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): I had intended to speak in the debate, but, because of a mechanical problem, I was unable to do so. As I was rising to my feet, an hon. Member was entering the Chamber and I did not manage to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that, by convention, a lengthy intervention on the Minister's winding-up speech will be entertained.

I welcome the proposed order proscribing these two organisations. They are splinter groups—one, I understand, from the Combined Loyalist Military Command and the other from the IRA. However, it would be wrong to think, as I am sure the Minister will agree, that proscription is any sort of panacea for the type of activity in which those organisations engage.

One of the problems has been that democratic process attempts to come to terms with violent terrorism have not worked. It is clear that democracy cannot co-exist

[Mr. Robert McCartney]

with violent terrorism with political objectives. As I am sure the Minister will agree, the inevitable outcome of the over-exposure of democracy to terrorism is that democracy itself is first corrupted and is then capable of being subsumed by that terrorism.

Perhaps the Minister should be aware that the peace process policy, which was to some extent created by the previous Government, but which has been endorsed and subsequently adopted by the present Government, has itself brought about many of the problems that the Government have to deal with.

The Government will be attempting to deal with two particular objectives that are mutually exclusive. The first is the holding of a peace resolution conference with the plenipotentiaries of violent terrorism and the other is the bringing about of a negotiated stable political settlement in Northern Ireland. The more that the Government attempt to achieve the former, the less they make available the prospects of the latter. While they may help, perhaps more cosmetically than substantively, it would be foolish to think that they will make a great contribution to the elimination of terrorism in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ingram: I appreciate the hon. and learned Gentleman's points. Perhaps his last two strayed a little from the order. He said that proscription of itself would not achieve the desired end result. I made those very points at the start of my speech.

The hon. and learned Gentleman's name appeared on the annunciator during his intervention, which is most unusual. Perhaps new things are happening in Parliament—new Labour, new screens. We shall have to learn as we go along. However, I take on board the hon. and learned Gentleman's points, and I have no doubt that we shall return to them in later debates.

Before that intervention, I was replying to the speech of the right hon. Member for Devizes. I dealt with his comments about the need for sensitivity in the context of relationships throughout the Province's divided community. He also spoke about the new Government in Dublin. I am sure that we all want to see that Government work progressively towards the achievement of peace in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann spoke about the witness protection scheme. That goes beyond the thrust of what the order seeks to achieve. Obviously, we shall reflect on what he said. Perhaps if I write to him on the detailed point, that will help him and other hon. Members.

The speech of the hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) was wide-ranging. We are debating the narrow issue of the proscription of two paramilitary organisations and, while it is not for me to say that any hon. Member strayed beyond the bounds of the order, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, had to call the hon. Gentleman to order. He raised several issues, including the functioning of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996, the Lloyd review and the Diplock courts. He made some constructive criticisms, but perhaps it is better to deal with the hon. Gentleman's specific points when we debate those aspects in terms of the Government's legislative programme. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will raise many of those issues again, when the House will be able to deal with them at greater length and on a more structured basis.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow—I apologise. Perhaps I have gone native in Northern Ireland and have forgotten my homeland of Scotland and its constituencies. I hope not. My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) spoke about the disgraceful scenes in Harryville. Today, I took the opportunity to go through the town of Harryville and I saw the church that is being repaired as a result of the weekend's events. We must all condemn what is going on there. It is simply outrageous. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State spoke about the way in which attempts are being made to stop people who are going about their lawful business or following their religious persuasions and attending church.

The speeches in the debate will contribute to a better understanding of the situation in Northern Ireland. My final point relates to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in opening the debate. Of itself, proscription cannot guarantee the prevention of terrorist acts, but it will make life harder for the terrorists.

For example, it will be illegal to solicit, invite or accept financial or other material support for the LVF or the CAC or knowingly to contribute to them. The order will make it illegal to solicit or invite membership of those organisations or to solicit or invite a person to carry out orders or directions given on behalf of the LVF or the CAC or requests made by a member of either of them.

It will also be illegal to arrange, manage or address a meeting knowing that it is to support those organisations or that it is to be addressed by a member of them. Finally, it will be illegal to dress in any way that arouses the reasonable apprehension that a person is a member of either of those organisations.

The effects that flow from the proscription of an organisation are not retrospective. Therefore, a person may be prosecuted for activities only if any of the above offences occur after the date of proscription. People know the purpose of the order, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996 (Amendment) Order 1997 (S. I., 1997, No. 1403), which was laid before this House on 3rd June, be approved.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 108 (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)),

That the Welsh Grand Committee shall meet in County Hall, Mold, on Monday 30th June at Eleven o'clock to take Questions pursuant to Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)), and to consider a Matter pursuant to Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)), proceedings being interrupted at half-past Four o'clock.—*[Mr. Graham Allen.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 19th June, Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Community documents) shall not apply to the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the Common Agricultural Policy, and the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on that Motion not later than three hours after their commencement.—*[Mr. Graham Allen.]*

Revenue Support Grant (Somerset)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Graham Allen.]*

6.47 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): This is a particularly timely debate in more ways than one. I am surprised to be addressing the House at such an early hour. As the Minister will appreciate, the debate is timely because of the announcement of the capping of Somerset county council a couple of weeks ago. It will come as no great surprise to him to hear me say that the capping announcement was a considerable disappointment to the many people I represent in Somerset and those in the wider county. They had hoped, perhaps in vain, for rather better from the new Government.

The county council will decide within the next week whether it wishes to appeal against that capping designation. I have a strong suspicion that it will decide that it will wish to appeal. If I am right, it will certainly have my support and that, I believe, of the other Members of Parliament representing Somerset. We will support the county council, because we believe that it has an extremely strong case.

That is not a surprising statement. All councils believe that they have a strong case to spend more. I have sat through enough meetings of the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance and other consultative bodies to know that the arguments that go backwards and forwards between local and central Government tend to be a little stereotypical and to be rehearsed in detail each year, but I honestly believe that there are good reasons why Somerset's case merits close consideration.

The first is that there is no doubt that Somerset county council is extremely badly treated by the formulae. Remember that, this time around, Somerset was given a capping limit of 2 per cent., the lowest of all the county authorities. Remember also that the amount that Somerset county council has budgeted to spend in excess of that limit is marginal in its context—a further 1.2 per cent and a total of £3.6 million.

Secondly, the county council has an extraordinary record of efficiency and prudence in the way in which it conducts its business, and we can substantiate that. Thirdly, the areas in which that money is be spent are precisely those that the new Government claim are their priorities over coming years. The county council has made it clear that its interests and priorities are to protect frail and elderly people, to provide a proper education for our children and to maintain the safety of citizens in Somerset. Those are, I hope, aspirations that the Government share.

Let us deal with the formulae. Somerset is not a high-spending authority. There are no aspects of county spending to which people can point and say, "There is an authority that spends over the top on its services." They can say, of course, that Somerset spends more than its standard spending assessment allowances. Were that not true, the county would be in a parlous state. It spends £12 million more than the education SSA. Despite that, its education spending is still 4 per cent. below the Audit Commission family average. No one who has visited Somerset schools and who knows the Somerset education service would believe that Somerset is a high-spending authority in terms of education.

[Mr. David Heath]

Why, then, is the SSA so inadequate? Technical issues need to be considered. They are based on sparsity factors and the rural nature of Somerset, which falls between all the measures that are reflected in the SSA. The SSA fails to reflect properly the growth not only in the population but in the clientele in the most important sectors—the number of children in school and the number of elderly persons and persons needing support from the social services departments.

Therefore, the SSA is at fault; and then we have the area cost adjustment. Were the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) here, I am sure that he would want to intervene at this point to say how important it is that the area cost adjustment be reviewed. He has consistently held that view from the moment that he ceased to be a Minister with responsibility for the environment.

Other factors, such as the landfill tax, weigh heavily on a county such as Somerset, which has no realistic alternatives because—again—of the sparsity of the population. It faces a substantial imposition in terms of the landfill tax, without the room within the capping formulae to provide.

Remember that a previous Government already considered an appeal against capping designation by Somerset in 1995–96 and, wonder of wonders, they agreed with us. Somerset is the only authority that has ever successfully gone through the cap and been granted every penny that it asked for. The formulae were clearly out of step with the county's needs. In that year, the council was granted an extra £2.6 million, which represented a 1 per cent. addition to its expenditure.

Let us consider the efficiency and effectiveness of the authority's education service. Somerset has the lowest administrative costs of any authority in the country—£9.29 per child; some authorities spend more than £120 per child. That is out of all proportion, and shows the level of the education service's effectiveness and efficiency. Somerset has the highest proportion of spending devolved to schools and, as I have mentioned, the highest spending above SSA of any county. It also has the lowest proportion of surplus places in primary schools. Given that we have many village schools and schools that are monopoly providers for the area they serve, that is a remarkable achievement.

The maximum amount of money that is provided from Government is going to our schools, yet our schools still suffer from underfunding. Class sizes have been steadily increasing. Last year, before the general election, I was the first Somerset education committee chairman in eight years to propose a budget that did not involve real-terms cuts, which is remarkable, but that depended on the county council being allowed to spend above the capping designation.

Social services are equally important. Somerset was one of the first counties to externalise its residential care service and it is the only one to have externalised domiciliary care. That may be right or it may be wrong, but what is absolutely certain is that the results are very low unit costs and very low management and support costs. That has just been checked by the Audit Commission and the social services inspectorate and it is demonstrably the case. Again, the fire service has among the lowest costs in the country, yet it is one of the most efficient brigades in terms of its call-out response time. Expenditure on highways maintenance, which is among the lowest in the country, has now been put into education.

All that means that the county is operating extremely effectively. There is no spare money. There is no scope for using reserves, as some authorities might, because there are no reserves. There have been no reserves for many years. Few—one can never say never—further administrative savings can be made within the county. The results of cutting real-terms expenditure are cuts in the services that people in the county need.

Where, therefore, will the extra £3.4 million of expenditure go? Is it to be frittered away? Of course not. It is to go in the main to education—an extra £2 million. Here I must declare an interest. I have two children in a Somerset school. They will be affected by the proposals. They will certainly be affected if the Government impose the capping limit.

I have mentioned that class sizes have increased. In 1995, 24.9 per cent. of primary classes in the county contained more than 30 children; in 1997, the figure has gone up to 31.6 per cent. We are not crying wolf. Those are real affects in our schools. As I have said, this year, we have a standstill budget, but what if the designation is confirmed? It will mean 90 teachers will lose their jobs. How do the Government reconcile that with the priority of education, education, education? How would they find the extra £1 million that will then have to be spent on redundancies, to sack teachers, instead of paying for more teachers for a better education for our children?

The rest of the money totals £1.4 million, which is to go towards social services. Already, we have limited support in the county for carers. Already, domestic support to the frail and elderly has been cut. Already, the home care service has been cut. If the designation is confirmed, 125 places for elderly people in care homes will be lost and 50,000 hours of personal care for the frail and elderly will be lost. The child care team will also be cut.

No caring council would contemplate making such cuts, and I suggest that no caring Government would contemplate enforcing them. I know that the Minister is a caring man: I am sure that he will consider my comments and listen to the representations made to him. I hope that he will not take it the wrong way when I ask him not to recite the brief to which he referred in replying to a similar debate on Oxfordshire several weeks ago. Parts of that brief seemed a little stale: perhaps they predated the change of Government and were written by the same civil servants. Perhaps the policy was a left-over from the previous Government.

I hope that the Minister will consider the realities of Somerset and its case. I hope that he will remember that the rationale for capping is to protect the public from irresponsible authorities and from excessive council tax increases. Somerset has a very low council tax compared with those of neighbouring authorities. It is not an extravagant authority, and there are no easy alternatives to be taken.

Who is being protected? Last week, I asked the Minister in a written question how many representations he had received from people in Somerset complaining about their council tax bills this year. The answer was none: not a single person from Somerset has complained

about his or her council tax. However, many people have written to say that they do not want cuts in education, social services or the fire service.

The Conservatives assisted us in the last county council election by opposing going through the cap, thereby presenting a clear alternative to the people of Somerset. As a result, the Liberal Democrats won by a massive margin and the Conservatives made very little progress. Therefore, like the Government in this place, the Liberal Democrats have a mandate in Somerset.

I ask the Minister to consider matters of local accountability. The Government have just signed the charter of local self-government. Let the Minister prove that he believes in self-government by allowing local people the discretion to make local decisions about local services and what they are prepared to pay for them. That will not affect the departmental totals; it will affect the total spend, but, as far as I know, that has not been capped. It will not affect the Department's contribution to local authorities, but it will allow the county of Somerset to offer a fair deal to our children and our elderly.

I hope that the Minister's reply will not involve further reviews of sparsity, area cost adjustments and the SSA system. The children of Somerset cannot wait for those reviews to take place. It is a truism that children have only one chance at education. If the council is forced to sack teachers, it will have a devastating effect on the children in Somerset schools now—next year, the year after, some time or never will be too late for those children. The Minister has an opportunity to make a real difference to the services provided in Somerset. I urge him to seize that opportunity in responding to the debate and, more important, in responding to those representations that I fully expect him to receive from the county of Somerset in due course.

7.3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) on his success in securing the Adjournment Debate this evening and on his powerful advocacy of his county council's case. He has put a strong and eloquent case, and I acknowledge his concern for the interests of his constituents and others in the county.

The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that my reply will inevitably reiterate many of the points that I made to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) during last week's debate. We are considering broad principles concerning the operation of local government finance that apply equally to Somerset and Oxfordshire county councils.

First, I shall make some general points about the new relationship between central and local government. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome mentioned in his speech, last week we signed the Council of Europe's charter of local self-government. That is a clear pledge of the Government's commitment to forging a new and constructive partnership with local government at home. Local government has a central role to play in tackling the neglect and mistakes of the past 18 years.

We recognise, and believe in, the importance of local government as an independent democratic institution. We want to reinvigorate local government in ways that encourage increased democracy, with local people having more say in the affairs of their council; increased autonomy, with more freedom for authorities to take their own decisions; increased accountability, with elected representatives being more visibly accountable for their actions; and increased partnership between central and local government and between local authorities and people, businesses and groups in their areas.

Within that framework, local authorities have important roles as commissioners and deliverers of a wide range of local services, of which education—which the hon. Gentleman described in considerable detail—housing and social services are often seen as the most important. Authorities are responsible for assessing service needs, balancing priorities, procuring delivery of services and providing them directly, monitoring standards, reviewing performance and acting on complaints.

However, local authorities are concerned with more than simply ensuring the delivery of high-quality services. We want to see local authorities develop their roles as leaders and champions of their areas: identifying local problems and areas of concern and developing strategies to address them; bringing groups, businesses and agencies together; and being the voice of local communities in dealing with Government, Europe, investors and other interests.

Local government is at the sharp end of the fight against deprivation. The Government will join local government in a concerted attack against the multiple causes of social and economic decline—social exclusion, unemployment, bad housing, crime, poor health and environmental problems. Good local government can play a key part in tackling those serious and deep-rooted problems.

Equally, we recognise that poor local government will stifle improvements not just directly in terms of the services that an authority provides, but by imposing an excessive cost burden on the community and creating a vacuum of community leadership. We therefore need to work with local government to ensure that people receive good-quality services from the whole of the public sector.

We also need to work together in developing our policies for local government. It is essential that we work together to create systems that work, and have detailed discussions about policy and implementation before we enact legislation. We want to forge close links with local government and related organisations that can make a real contribution. We want to see practical experience and knowledge brought to bear at the early, formative stages of policy development, and not left to the end of the process, when minds are made up and the scope for change is limited.

We have all had too much experience recently of central Government legislating in haste, and local government having to live with, and sort out, the problems that followed. We must now start to work together on future legislation. We must examine ways in which we can develop pilot studies on a wide range of issues including best value, a new approach to regeneration, community planning and partnerships with other agencies and democratic innovations.

We must—and intend to—work together to assess the scope of the new duty on local authorities to promote economic, social and environmental well-being in their areas, and on ways in which we can strengthen local

[Mr. Nick Raynsford]

authorities' community leadership role, facilitate innovation, and encourage local partnerships in the delivery of services. Of course, we must work closely with local government in order to implement our manifesto commitments on local government finance.

As to this year's settlement, all public expenditure programmes must be examined rigorously each year, and local government spending—which accounts for a quarter of all public expenditure—is no exception. Decisions on local government spending must take account of the pressures on local authorities and of the scope for greater efficiency and effectiveness within those authorities.

As I have stressed on other occasions, we have inherited this year's local government spending plans and are clearly committed to retaining them. Although we are committed to reviewing the local government finance system in future years, for this year at least we must work within the current spending plans.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater) *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman has just entered the Chamber. He cannot expect me to give way when he has not heard the opening speech by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome and has had little opportunity to listen to my comments. I have made it quite clear that we inherited the local government spending arrangements.

Mr. King *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I have already said that I am not prepared to give way to the right hon. Gentleman, who was not present for the speech by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome.

Mr. King: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that this debate is entitled to run until 10 pm? The fact that the Government's business has collapsed does not affect that, so I hope that the Minister will reflect on that fact. I want to make only a brief intervention and I had already asked the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) whether I could intervene. I happen to be a Somerset county Member. It would be unfortunate if the Minister, who is aware that the debate could continue until 10 pm, chooses not to allow me to make my brief intervention. I hope that he will feel able to accommodate me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Whether hon. Members give way is not a matter for the Chair—it is entirely a matter for the Minister.

Mr. Raynsford: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have made it clear to the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) that I am not giving way, and I shall explain why. He knows that this is a short debate and he is aware of the convention on Adjournment debates. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome had the courtesy to tell me, before the debate began, that he had received a request from the right hon. Gentleman to intervene. Had the right hon. Gentleman been in the Chamber for this debate, I would have been happy to agree to that. However, he was not here. He did not have the courtesy to come to the Chamber and listen to the speech of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome. Instead, he has come here 20 minutes after the start of the debate and expects to intervene, even though he has not listened to any of the comments of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome and shows no interest in listening to what I have to say. I consider that to be a considerable discourtesy. The right hon. Gentleman, who has many years of experience in the House, should know better.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome introduced the debate in an intelligent, sensible and courteous way. He made a number of points about standard spending assessments. Since 1990–91, Somerset's overall SSA has increased broadly in line with the average increase for English authorities. For 1997–98, its SSA has increased by 1.9 per cent., which is only just below the average increase for shire counties and is well above the average 1.5 per cent. increase for English authorities as a whole.

The hon. Gentleman reasonably raised the question of the education SSA. He made a valid point, because Somerset's education SSA is relatively low compared with that of other counties—it is 33rd out of the 35 counties. It was an entirely proper point for him to make. However, what he did not say was that, on a number of other SSAs, Somerset does relatively well—for example, on highways maintenance it comes fourth out of the 35 counties, on other services 11th, and on social services 15th. We acknowledge that the case he made on education is valid, but it is only a partial case that relates to only one service; it does not take account of the broad range.

The hon. Gentleman will understand that the framework for SSAs involves assessments of the need to spend under various headings. Those needs vary from authority to authority. Authorities will do well on some, but less well on others. That reflects the circumstances in their areas and the need for them to spend in relation to other authorities. That is why it is possible for an authority to score relatively low in relation to other authorities on some indicators, but to score relatively well on other indicators. That is the case with Somerset.

Mr. David Heath: I am sure that the Minister agrees that the education SSA and the revenue that derives from it is so large in comparison with the other services provided by a county council that, if the education SSA is wrongly assessed—especially to the degree that I think the hon. Gentleman almost recognised in his comments—that has an effect on every other service, as well as on the level of education that the county hopes to provide.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly valid point. I have no doubt that, as and when the county seeks to make representations, that will be in the forefront of the issues raised. We shall listen carefully to any representations from the hon. Gentleman, his colleagues in the county council and others.

SSAs are the basis for the distribution of revenue support grant. They are based on measures of spending need that apply to all local authorities and they are discussed with representatives of local government. The SSAs for 1997–98 have been announced. As with total local government spending plans, we have said that they will not be revisited, and we do not propose to do so now.

Having said that, we are committed to a fair distribution of Government grant among authorities, and we believe that there is scope for improvement in the arrangements in future years. My colleagues and I shall look closely at the current SSA system. We shall listen to local government views on how SSAs might be improved, both for 1998–99 and in the longer term.

As the hon. Gentleman feels that the SSA system does not treat Somerset fairly, I should be happy to examine any proposals he has for different methods of calculation. However, as I pointed out to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon last week, any system of this nature has to be universal, and any changes would need to apply to all authorities equally. When making any changes, we will, of course, want to be sure that they will produce a sounder assessment of needs.

Mr. Tom King: I want to apologise to the Minister for my earlier intervention. I am grateful to him for his courtesy in giving way now. He, too, is a long-serving Member, so he will understand that there is a problem when business collapses ahead of time. I merely wanted to point out that there is concern about the area cost adjustment. We made representations to the previous Government and a study was set up. Unfortunately, the basis on which it went forward led to an unhelpful result and we were then forced to ask for the study not to be implemented.

I apologise again to both the Minister and the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome for my inadvertent discourtesy in not being here at the start of the debate. I would be grateful for advice on what work is being done. I hope that the Minister or his colleague, the Minister of State, will receive a delegation of Somerset Members of Parliament who wish to press the urgency for a fresh approach to the ACA formula, which is so important in determining the overall level of expenditure for Somerset.

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Gentleman makes a valid point and I am happy that I allowed him to intervene. My previous comments related solely to the way in which his earlier intervention arose. I recognise that he has represented the area for a long time and has been involved in the issue of area cost adjustment, which has produced some curious consequences. The issue is complex, like many other elements in the local government finance scheme. Many of us start off with high hopes of achieving significant improvements. We set out our proposals, only to find that the consequences are very complex and often not as helpful as we had hoped.

It is a difficult area. I take the right hon. Gentleman's point about the need to re-examine the issue. If he and other hon. Members seek a meeting with either me or the Minister of State, we shall be glad to hear their representations.

With regard to capping, we again gave clear signals that, although we propose to replace in due course the current crude capping system, it would have to wait for future years. In the meantime, we said that we were proposing to follow the intentions of the previous Government for 1997–98. All authorities, including Somerset county council, knew that when setting their budgets.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said that there was disappointment in the county council at our decision. It may have been disappointed, but it cannot have been surprised, because it was made clear that this year's local government framework was inherited and that the caps would apply.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I was present at the debate on Oxfordshire last week. I have heard the Minister's remarks so far tonight, although I am afraid that I did not hear all of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). The Minister has said once again that he is relying on the previous Government's plans in respect of both Somerset and Oxfordshire. There has been a strong indication from Conservative Members that, had they remained in government, they would have listened very carefully to representations made by Somerset and by Oxfordshire, and that they probably would have agreed with them. Will the Minister do the same?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman would be showing surprising naivety if he believed Conservative Members' protestations that they would act differently if they were still in government. It is very easy to repent after the event, and I am sceptical about such blandishments. The Government, however, will listen very carefully to the specific representations that we expect to receive from the counties of Somerset and—after last week's debate—Oxfordshire. We shall also do our best to accommodate sensible proposals for changes in the system that may help in future, and we shall listen to the authorities' case on this year's settlement.

Of 436 authorities, only three have set budgets that are significantly over their provisional capping limits. Our decision to designate those authorities demonstrates that we are taking our spending commitments seriously. We have also made it clear that, under our plans for replacing the current capping system in future, we shall retain reserve powers to control excessive council tax rises. Therefore, this year, all three authorities will be required to reduce their budgets unless they can demonstrate to us that they should not.

Under the capping legislation, capping principles apply to classes of authority, and we can consider an individual authority's detailed circumstances only if it budgets over cap. Somerset county council, having been through the process before, is well aware of that principle. The county was granted a capping concession on the previous occasion, in 1995–96—the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said that it was a unique achievement—when, after making its representations, it was granted a concession of £2.6 million. That concession led not only to relief in that financial year but to a permanent increase in the authority's base budget, from which it continues to benefit.

This year, Somerset was allowed to increase its budget by 2 per cent. On the information available, there is nothing to suggest that Somerset is in a tougher position than counties that have budgeted within cap. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome made the point that, in his opinion, Somerset was allowed the smallest cap increase of any authority. I do not think that that is correct, however, because many other counties received a 2 per cent. increase, and many other local authorities received 1.5 per cent. Therefore, Somerset was not alone in its increase.

As I said, the Government do not believe that Somerset is in a tougher position than counties that budgeted within cap. Our proposed cap would still allow the county to

[Mr. Raynsford]

increase its budget by £5.58 million over its 1996 budget, when it fixed a budget that was within its cap. On the evidence that we have received to date, we think that that is a reasonable and achievable goal. As I said, however, we welcome and will listen carefully to any representations made by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome or by Somerset county council.

Decisions on priorities between services is a matter for the authority itself. I accept entirely the importance that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome attaches to education, because the Government have a similar concern for education. I am sure that he will accept, however, that it would be wrong for central Government to say how it believes authorities should divide their spending, because that is a matter for local authorities. It is not for me to suggest where authorities should make any reductions if their cap is confirmed. Local authorities would quite reasonably object if we attempted to dictate in such a manner.

At this stage in the capping process, authorities can accept the caps that we have proposed. When that happens, the cap limit is set by notice, and the authority can immediately set a revised lower budget and recalculate its council tax. Obviously, sending new bills will impose an extra administrative burden, the expense of which will have to be met from within the authority's revised budget. Such expense is a result of the authority's decision to breach the provisional cap, and all authorities are aware of those implications.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): Does the Minister realise that many Members will find his answer slightly depressing? He and the Labour party were elected to government, by a quite substantial margin, with a mandate for a fresh start. Furthermore, a part of the Labour manifesto dealt with a brand new start with local government, which, for the past 18 years, has been held in a stranglehold. Controls over most of UK local government—unlike controls over most local governments in Europe—have been excessive.

Does the Minister also realise that the local government elections, which were held on 1 May, also comprehensively rejected the Conservatives? The mandate at both national and local level, therefore, is to pursue a policy opposite to that pursued by the previous Government. I therefore do not understand why the Minister is pursuing a Conservative party policy. How can he be so attracted to capping when capping is anathema to equality between local and central Government, and by what right does he feel that he and other Ministers can override the wishes of the electorate and of individual county and district councils? The electorate voted for one policy, but a different policy is being imposed by the Government.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman cannot have been listening to my speech. I made it absolutely clear that the Government are committed to a new relationship with local authorities and to dealing with many of the problems that he and other Opposition Members have highlighted. I have also made it clear that we inherited a financial settlement that came into operation a month before we were elected. We have made it quite clear that, this year, we shall be working within that financial framework. It would not be possible to make such a commitment to the electorate and then to renege on it without being subjected to criticism of being a party that does not honour its pledges to the electorate.

The Government clearly stated what we would do—that we would work within the financial framework that we inherited—and we are doing it. We are, however, simultaneously examining ways in which we can improve relationships between local and central Government and improve local government's future financial framework. We shall improve those relationships and that framework.

Should Somerset wish to challenge its cap, it will have 28 days from the date of designation—until 18 June—to propose an alternative amount and to provide its reasons for doing so. The authority will not only be able to submit its written case, but will have an opportunity to meet me or one of my colleagues to make its case directly. A meeting has provisionally been arranged—for 26 June 1997—with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who has responsibility for housing and local government. We shall consider all the relevant points, including those made in this debate, before reaching our final decision.

Final caps will be stated in an order, which is, of course, subject to approval by the House. Once that process is complete, we shall notify the authority of its maximum permitted budget. If a budget reduction is confirmed, the authority would have 21 days in which to calculate a substitute budget requirement. It would then, of course, have to set a reduced council tax.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Seven o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 2 June 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Mr. Singh, Leicester

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he assessed the representations made by the hon. Member for Leicester, East concerning the case of Mr. Singh of Leicester; and what was the cost to public funds of the case. [1481]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I reviewed the representations made by the hon. Member for Leicester, East in this case on 15 May and wrote to him that day, conveying my decision. Mr. Singh was removed to India on 20 May.

It is not the practice to calculate the costs to public funds of individual cases of illegal entry and such estimates could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners

Mr. Vaz: To as the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners there are currently in each prison in the United Kingdom, indicating in each case the maximum number of inmates the prison are designed to hold. [1464]

Ms Joyce Quin: The table lists all the prisons in England and Wales, their operational capacities and population figures for 22 May 1997.

Table 1: Operational capacity[1] and population figures[2]

Prison	*Operational capacity*	*Population*
Acklington	662	649
Albany	436	427
Aldington	145	145
Ashwell	454	454
Askham Grange	132	127
Aylesbury	328	314
Bedford	376	364
Belmarsh	901	874
Birmingham	1,043	1,034
Blakenhurst	750	737
Blantyre House	120	120
Blundeston	408	401
Brinsford	509	517
Bristol	587	576
Brixton	645	625
Brockhill	159	154
Buckley Hall	350	348
Bullingdon	704	697
Bullwood Hall	126	127
Camp Hill	531	513
Canterbury	300	305
Cardiff	716	718
Castington	300	301
Channings Wood	615	603
Chelmsford	497	461
Colchester	38	29
Coldingley	296	295

Table 1: Operational capacity[1] and population figures[2]

Prison	*Operational capacity*	*Population*
Cookham Wood	150	149
Dartmoor	606	592
Deerbolt	466	436
Doncaster	1,011	1,018
Dorchester	238	239
Dover	316	310
Downview	333	330
Drake Hall	285	274
Durham	917	921
East Sutton Park	100	94
Eastwood Park	138	128
Elmley	715	712
Erlestoke	310	307
Everthorpe	465	461
Exeter	473	472
Featherstone	599	596
Feltham	922	912
Ford	486	467
Frankland	447	448
Full Sutton	386	391
Garth	533	528
Gartree	364	364
Glen Parva	882	872
Gloucester	290	282
Grendon	235	213
Guys Marsh	315	313
Haslar	158	110
Hatfield	180	170
Haverigg	555	551
Hewell Grange	202	193
High Down	714	708
Highpoint	703	698
Hindley	551	543
Hollesley Bay	470	402
Holloway	532	523
Holme House	871	827
Hull	530	524
Huntercombe	266	259
Kingston	129	111
Kirkham	702	695
Kirklevington	180	161
Lancaster	218	209
Lancaster Farms	536	515
Latchmere House	187	174
Leeds	906	913
Leicester	348	358
Lewes	496	491
Leyhill	422	416
Lincoln	650	638
Lindholme	696	691
Littlehey	648	640
Liverpool	1,452	1,453
Long Lartin	379	390
Low Newton	299	302
Maidstone	570	564
Manchester	1,124	1,051
Moorland	665	666
Morton Hall	192	189
Mount	628	620
New Hall	226	237
North Sea Camp	213	206
Northallerton	298	296
Norwich	744	719
Nottingham	384	263
Onley	520	515
Parkhurst	313	324
Pentonville	929	904
Portland	536	528
Prescoed	128	93

Table 1: Operational capacity[1] and population figures[2]

Prison	*Operational capacity*	*Population*
Preston	640	625
Ranby	538	533
Reading	245	234
Risley	868	834
Rochester	435	388
Send	231	171
Shepton Mallett	220	216
Shrewsbury	323	323
Spring Hill	210	204
Stafford	627	624
Standford Hill	384	382
Stocken	462	460
Stoke Heath	322	314
Styal	262	259
Sudbury	511	498
Swaleside	542	541
Swansea	350	344
Swinfen Hall	202	203
Thorn Cross	316	255
Usk	187	181
Verne	577	572
Wakefield	613	601
Wandsworth	876	870
Wayland	652	647
Wealstun	591	575
Wellingborough	322	321
Werrington	121	122
Wetherby	120	120
Whatton	226	224
Whitemoor	530	509
Winchester	612	620
Wolde	400	396
Woodhill	685	671
Wormwood Scrubs	1,362	1,293
Wymott	805	798

[1] The prison population includes inmates on authorised absence.

[2] Operational capacity is defined as the total number of prisoners which an establishment can hold without serious risk to good order, security and the proper running of the planned regime.

Naturalisation Applications

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the language test for naturalisation applications. [1480]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have no plans to review the statutory requirement that applicants for naturalisation under section 6(1) of the British Nationality Act 1981 should have sufficient knowledge of the English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic language. There is no language requirement for those applying as the spouse of a British citizen.

In 1996, only 27 applicants out of the 17,670 applications determined were refused citizenship because of their failure to meet this requirement.

There remains a residual discretion for the Secretary of State to waive the need to fulfil the requirement if he considers that because of the applicant's age or physical or mental condition, it would be unreasonable to expect it to be fulfilled.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average time taken to process naturalisation applications. [1479]

Mr. O'Brien: Sixteen months, as at 30 April 1997.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications by persons of independent means have been dealt with by the Immigration and Nationality Department so far in 1997. [1816]

Mr. O'Brien: The information requested is given in the table:

Persons of independent means[1] January to April 1997

	Number of persons[2]
Given leave to enter the country	30
After-entry applications for an extension of stay dealt with[3]	90

[1] The requirement restricting persons of independent means to those who are at least 60 years old was introduced on 1 October 1994, but extant cases were not affected.

[2] Figures are provisional.

[3] Including persons of independent means seeking an extension of stay in another category or seeking settlement, and other persons seeking an extension of stay as a retired person of independent means.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current waiting time for consideration of applications for each of the divisions of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [796]

Mr. O'Brien: The available information on waiting times is given in the table.

Average waiting time from receipt of application to decision for applications decided in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at the end of April 1997:

	Months
After entry and Appeals Directorate[1]	4
Asylum Directorate[2]	
Pre-1993 Act applications	50
Post-1993 Act applications	13
European Directorate[1]	
Residence permits	
35 per cent. within	1
62 per cent. within	2
90 per cent. within	6
Residence documents	
19 per cent. within	1
35 per cent. within	2
66 per cent. within	6
Nationality Directorate	
Naturalisations	16
Independent registrations[3]	7

[1] Data relate to the first quarter of 1997.

[2] Data relate to the 6 months October 1996–March 1997.

[3] Registration not dependent upon a parent's application for naturalisation.

Electoral Practices

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he will take to improve publicity on the *(a)* availability and procedure for postal and proxy votes and *(b)* the procedure for voter registration. [1495]

Mr. George Howarth: Absent voting facilities were publicised at the general election through a television campaign and advertisements, including an application form, in national daily, national Sunday and ethnic minority newspapers. We are reviewing the effectiveness of this publicity and are considering how best to publicise this autumn's canvass for electoral registration.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish a standing electoral commission to monitor and keep under review electoral law, procedure and practice. [1496]

Mr. Howarth: We have no present plans to do so.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State of the Home Department what steps he will take to reform the procedure of electoral registration; and what steps he will take to reduce the amount of time which elapses between the last day for registration for a given election, and the election. [1494]

Mr. Howarth: We have no plans at present to make changes to the system of electoral registration, or to extend the time before an election during which additions can be made to the register beyond the current deadline of the closing date for candidates' nominations for the election concerned. But we will keep these matters under review.

Detainees

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which categories of detainees may be kept for unspecified periods of time in HM Prison Service establishments or detention centres without being charged with a crime. [783]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Prison Service keeps in custody those subject to a warrant of commitment or other lawful detention order. Those held for unspecified periods of time will be remanded by a court awaiting trial, sentence or extradition proceedings or be detained under Immigration Act powers.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1249]

Mr. Straw: My Department is aware of the problem. Year 2000 managers have been appointed in each business area to deal with it and a steering committee, chaired at director level, has been established to monitor and co-ordinate action taken across the Department. The Department's information technology (IT) supplier (Sema Group) has completed an audit of IT systems and is about to commence more detailed analysis. The aim is to produce a prioritised, costed programme of action by October 1997 and to have implemented and tested modified systems by the end of 1998. This is in line with the recommendations of the Central IT Unit (CITU) and the National Audit Office.

We are participating in the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency's programme of consultation and education and are members of the Year 2000 Public Sector Group.

Firearms Act 1997

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place a copy in the Library of the guidance issued by his Department to police forces concerning the Firearms Act 1997. [1309]

Mr. Michael: A copy of the police guidance will be placed in the Library when it is issued. This will be immediately after the draft compensation scheme has been debated and approved by Parliament. The debates are expected to take place very shortly.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of the asylum seekers on hunger strike at HMP Birmingham/Winson Green, since 5 May have been detained longer than two months; and if he will list them and the periods for which they have been detained; [782]

(2) how many of the cases of asylum seekers on hunger strike at HMP Birmingham/Winson Green have been brought for independent review before a judicial authority; [784]

(3) how many of the hunger strikers at HMP Birmingham/Winson Green have alleged torture in their applications for asylum; and, of those, how many have had access to independent medical assessment of their allegations. [785]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There is currently only one asylum seeker refusing regular prison meals at Her Majesty's prison Birmingham. It would not be proper to disclose details of an individual case.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the detained asylum seekers at HMP Birmingham/Winson Green were detained prior to an initial determination of their application. [786]

Mr. O'Brien: As at 30 May 1997, the most recent date for which information is available, a total of 11 persons who had sought asylum at some stage were recorded as being solely detained under Immigration Act powers in Her Majesty's Prison, Winson Green, Birmingham. Of those, nine persons were detained prior to an initial determination on their asylum application. Three of these nine detainees had previously been detained as part of a criminal sentence. They have all subsequently had an initial determination and four have also been through the appeals process and are now awaiting removal.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to undertake a review of the policy of detention of asylum seekers. [787]

Mr. O'Brien: A general review of immigration detention policy is currently being undertaken.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are held in detention under immigration and asylum legislation in *(a)* prison and *(b)* detention centres; and of those how many have been held for (i) 0 to three months, (ii) three to six months, (iii) six months to one year and (iv) over one year. [1748]

Mr. O'Brien: The number of persons held in detention under immigration and asylum legislation on 31 March 1997, the most recent date that statistics are available, is given in table 1. An analysis of this data by length of detention is shown in table 2.

Table 1: Persons detained under immigration and asylum legislation on 31 March 1997

	Number
Prisons Service establishments in England and Wales[1]	475
Immigration Service detention centres	509
Total	984

[1] Excluding persons in police cells and Scottish prisons; data on such persons are incomplete.

Table 2: Length of detention of persons detained under immigration and asylum legistration on 31 March 1997

	Number
0 to 3 months [1]	594
3 to 6 months	211
6 months to 1 year	153
over 1 year	26
Total	984

[1] Includes and estimate of non asylum port cases detained.

Mr. Marshall-Andrews: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Prison Service is taking to investigate and resolve the unrest among asylum seekers held in Rochester Prison. [1328]

Ms Joyce Quin: Current unrest amongst the general population of immigration detainees held in Rochester prison is believed to centre on complaints about prison food, being locked in their cells for longer than normal and their access to education facilities being cut. However, no formal complaint has been received.

The meals and menus are checked regularly by the governor, the area manager, catering adviser and members of the Board of Visitors and have been adjudged wholesome and varied. The regime of the whole prison has been temporarily reduced because of the need to provide staff for a bedwatch on a prisoner in the Medway hospital, aggravated by a high level of sick leave. This has resulted in a reduction in the time out of cell of all prisoners and the closure of education facilities for the detainees. To compensate for this, wing-based education is being introduced for the detainees from Monday 2 June 1997 until a normal regime can be restored.

Drug Misuse

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research his Department has evaluated on the impact of drug misuse on crime; what representations his Department has received on funding for services relating to drug misuse; what impact the new methodology for allocating resources for drug misuse services will have on the level of funding allocated for East Lancashire; and if he will make a statement. [1440]

Mr. George Howarth: The Home Office has a research programme designed to shed further light on the links between drugs and crime.

Recently evaluated projects include drug prevalence findings from the 1994 British Crime Survey, lifestyles of crack and heroin addicts in Manchester and public attitudes to drug-related crime.

The funding of services for the treatment of drug misuse is a matter for the Department of Health. No representations have been received by the Home Office on the new methodology for allocating resources for such services.

Primary Purpose Rule

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to announce the outcome of his review of the primary purpose rule. [1125]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 22 May, *Official Report*, column *109*.

Asylum Applications

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum were determined in each month during 1997 to date; and in each month how many were rejected. [1124]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The requested information is given in the table.

Initial decisions[1, 2] on asylum applications received in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants

January to April 1997.

Month	*Total decisions*	*Of which: Refused asylum and exceptional leave to remain*
January	3,260	2,580
February	3,090	2,410
March	2,845	2,410
April	3,390	2,945
Total	12,585	10,345

[1] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[2] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5.

Deportations

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* EC and *(b)* Irish nationals have been deported in the last five years. [1751]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information on European Community and Irish nationals is given in the table. Reliable statistics are not available for 1992. The number deported does not include those who are removed as illegal entrants or under port refusal procedures.

Persons removed[1] from the United Kingdom under the deportation process[2] 1993–96

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*[3]1966*
Irish nationals	4	10	1	4
EC nationals	73	47	41	61

[1] Including voluntary departures after deportation action had been initiated.

[2] Excluding illegal entrants removed.

[3] Provisional data.

Irish Prisoners (Repatriation)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) in how many cases, to date, the papers of Irish prisoners who have applied for repatriation have been passed to the Irish Government; in how many cases prisoners have awaited a response for *(a)* more than three months, *(b)* more than four months, *(c)* more than five months and *(d)* a longer period; what consultation has taken place between both Governments to expedite the processing of such applications; and if he will make a statement; [1767]

(2) how many Irish prisoners have been repatriated to the Irish Republic since the Irish Government ratified the relevant convention; how many prisoners are currently awaiting repatriation; what proposals Her Majesty's Government have to accelerate such repatriation; and if he will make a statement. [1768]

Ms Joyce Quin: Seventy-five requests for repatriation to the Irish Republic have been referred to the Irish Government. Of these, from the date of first application for repatriation to the date of notification of the final outcome of the request, one prisoner was notified of the decision in his case in less than three months; the remaining 74 prisoners have awaited notification of a final decision for six months or more. Of these, 19 prisoners have been notified of the outcome of their applications and 55 applications remain to be determined.

To date, 10 prisoners have been repatriated to the Republic. Six prisoners whose applications for repatriation to the Republic have been agreed by all parties concerned are currently awaiting repatriation.

Officials in the two jurisdictions are in regular contact regarding the processing of repatriation applications and ways of ensuring that such requests are dealt with as quickly as possible.

Immigration Cases

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to take a decision on immigration case refs. IMP M672147/2(s), TH/41841/93, IMM 136180, about which the Adjudicator made recommendations on 22 November 1996. [1803]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The adjudicator's determination was not issued to the Home Office until 21 February 1997. Although this made a recommendation that entry clearance be granted, it did not state whether the appeal had been allowed or dismissed. On 27 March, the Immigration Appeals Authority informed the Home Office that the appeal had in fact been allowed.

The entry clearance officer in Islamabad was subsequently instructed to issue entry clearance and this instruction was reiterated on 23 May 1997. The appellant's representatives in the United Kingdom have been informed of this.

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the names of the political and special advisers who have been appointed to his Department since the General Election. [1744]

Mr. Straw: Mr. Norman Warner and Mr. Ed Owen have been appointed as special advisers in this Department.

Volunteers Week

Mr. Stephen Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support his Department will be giving to Volunteers Week. [1908]

Mr. Michael: Volunteers Week, which I was pleased to help launch this morning and which will run until 7 June, is a great opportunity to celebrate the enormous commitment made by volunteers to the life of our communities, and to encourage the involvement of others. The National Centre for Volunteering co-ordinates this annual event and receives financial support from the Home Office to do so.

I am delighted to be able to participate in the week by taking up the challenge issued by the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS) to hon. Members to give up an hour of their time to volunteer on a WRVS project. I hope that all hon. Members will join me in participating in Volunteers Week to acknowledge the achievements of volunteers, who give freely of their time and talents throughout the year and whose involvement makes such a difference to so many people.

Humberside Police

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will announce his policy on the change of name of the Humberside police to the Humber police. [1030]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 22 May 1997]:* I am issuing a consultation paper today to seek the views of the local police, police authority and local authorities on the Government's preferred option of not proceeding with the name change unless there is clear evidence of local support for the change. I am also writing today to all hon. Members for constituencies in the Humberside police area to seek their views in response to the consultation paper.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Holocaust (Documents)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make available for public inspection all documents held in the Public Record Office regarding the Nazi Holocaust. [1451]

Mr. Hoon: Questions of release of closed records in the Public Record Office are in the first instance the responsibility of individual Departments. Departments keep closed records regularly under review for release, if the sensitivity has lapsed. However no closed war time records relating to the Nazi holocaust have currently been identified in the Public Record Office.

Radioactive Waste Disposal (Documents)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library of all documents deposited in the Public Record Office by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority concerning the disposal of plutonium contaminated radioactive waste of United Kingdom origin at the Hurd Deep. [1437]

Mr. Hoon: Forty two files have been identified among records transferred by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority to the Public Record Office which relate to the disposal of radioactive waste at the Hurd Deep. All are open to public inspection, except one which is not yet thirty years old. Arrangements are in hand to make this one item available. The making of copies of this quantity of material for the Library could only be done at disproportionate cost.

DEFENCE

RAF Chilmark

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *25*, when he will discuss the future of the Chilmark Section of RAF Chilmark with the local planning authority, Salisbury district council. [1286]

Mr. Spellar: My officials are due to discuss the potential uses of the Chilmark site with Salisbury District Council shortly. My reply on the 20 May, *Official Report*, column *258*, should have included both Salisbury district council and Fovant parish council which were omitted in error.

Chartered Vessels

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to ensure that vessels chartered by the MOD are British-flagged and crewed; and if he will make a statement. [1071]

Dr. John Reid: The Ministry of Defence is always eager to charter British flagged and crewed ships where they offer best value for money in meeting our requirements. Experience has shown however, that, in general, British ships, particularly for certain categories such as dry cargo vessels, are fully committed to regular trading activities and are seldom offered for charter.

In today's security environment, a substantial part of any logistic shipping requirement can be met on the worldwide market where vessels need not necessarily be British flagged or crewed as demonstrated during the Gulf war, in subsequent operations and in day to day activities. The hon. Member will, of course, be aware of the important contribution made by the specialist ships and civilian crews of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Service who provide such sterling assistance to our armed forces around the globe.

Departmental Property

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has to commission research into current planning guidance and practice on the disposal of his Department's sites and to investigate the wider social consequences of disposal; [1212]

(2) what plans he has to review the current policy for the disposal of surplus departmental land and sites; and if he will make a statement; [1218]

(3) if he will commission a research project to establish the total public costs and benefits of major disposals of his Department's property as an alternative to the present policy; and if he will make a statement. [1217]

Mr. Spellar: Our policy is to dispose of surplus property in a timely manner which takes into account the Government's wider employment and environmental objectives, local planning and social considerations, and the need to protect the taxpayers interest. We are currently in discussions with the DoE on the broader planning and development policy context within which such disposal take place.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's houses are empty in each district council area in Hampshire. [1214]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has 1,225 empty houses in Hampshire. Of these, 133 are surplus agreed for disposal; 257 are allocated for deployments or individual moves; 340 are awaiting works/modernisation and 14 await furnishings.

A breakdown by district council area is as follows:

	Number
East Hampshire District Council	55
Eastleigh Borough Council	2
Fareham District Council	26
Gosport District Council	347
Hart District Council	103
Havant District Council	6
New Forest District Council	57
Portsmouth Unitary Authority	111
Rushmoor Borough Council	395
Test Valley Borough Council	73
Winchester District Council	50

Waste Disposal (Hurd Deep)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the responsibilities

his Department retains for monitoring the safety of plutonium contaminated radioactive waste disposed of in the Hurd Deep. [1433]

Mr. Spellar: My Department is not responsible for monitoring marine radioactive waste disposal sites.

Red Deer Hunting

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations of the Ministry of Defence land on which hunting of red deer currently takes place; and what plans he has to review the authorisation of that activity. [1267]

Mr. Spellar: No licences have been issued for the hunting of Red deer on land owned by the Ministry of Defence. There are no plans to review the authorisation of that activity. Some limited culling of red deer takes place, as a part of routine management.

C130J

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of acquiring C130J transport aircraft; and if the acquisition programme has met its implementation milestones. [1335]

Mr. Spellar: The total estimated cost of the C130J programme to the defence equipment budget is around £1.8 billion. The programme has not yet met its implementation milestones as a result of development problems and difficulties in meeting the flight test and certification objectives. These have caused a delay of about one year to initial aircraft deliveries.

Pensions (Gurkha Regiment)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he plans to hold with his Nepalese counterpart regarding pension payments to former members of the Gurkha Regiment who served in Hong Kong. [1491]

Dr. John Reid: I currently have no plans to discuss pension payments to former members of the Gurkha Regiment who served in Hong Kong with the Government of Nepal.

Future Large Aircraft

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution his Department has made to the Future Large Aircraft programme; and if he will make a statement on its commitment to purchase the FLA. [1332]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has been closely involved in discussions with European partners on the Future Large Aircraft programme, which is a potential solution to our future air transport requirements. We are currently considering the way forward and will take a decision as soon as possible.

Eurofighter (Employment)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom jobs are currently dependent on Eurofighter; and how many he estimates there will be at the peak of production. [1020]

Mr. Spellar: The Eurofighter development programme currently sustains about 6,000 jobs in the United Kingdom. This figure is expected to rise to about 14,000 at the peak of production.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total public expenditure cost to date of the United Kingdom's contribution to the European fighter aircraft project; and what is his estimate of the future cost. [1629]

Mr. Spellar: Up to 31 March 1997 the UK's expenditure on the Eurofighter programme totalled £2.7 billion. Future UK procurement expenditure is currently estimated at £12,744 million. Figures are at average 1996–97 prices.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1673]

Mr. Spellar: My Department's publications are not routinely available in alternative formats for public use, although this may be arranged on individual request. No special measures have been taken to publicise this service. Internally, we provide a range of Departmental publications in alternative formats to staff who request them. This is widely publicised in the Department's house journals etc. as part of the MOD's commitment to providing equal opportunities for blind staff or those with visual impairment.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the names of the political and special advisers appointed to his Department since the general election. [1628]

Mr. George Robertson: I have appointed Mr. Alasdair McGowan as a Special Adviser.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1674]

Mr. Spellar: Given the nature of my Department's responsibilities I am unable to foresee a situation in which Defence Ministers would be required to frame legislative proposals which would impact significantly on disabled people. In its role as an employer of civilian staff, however, my Department aims, among other things, to tackle any environmental and attitudinal barriers which may exist in the workplace which prevent disabled staff from achieving their full potential. The Programme of Action on Disability is planned to be launched later this year.

Military Exports (Saudi Arabia)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the National Audit Office's report on the Al Yamamah military export deal with Saudi Arabia to be published. [1694]

Mr. Spellar: I understand that the then Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee decided that the 1992 National Audit Office Report into the Ministry of Defence's involvement in the Al-Yamamah programme should not be published as it refers to arrangements which are confidential between the Governments of the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia.

Test and Firing Ranges

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to receive recommendations from the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency about the future of the test and firing ranges; and if he will make a statement. [973]

Mr. Spellar: My noble colleague the Minister for Defence Procurement expects shortly to receive advice on the options for reducing the capacity of the test and evaluation land ranges managed by DERA. He will announce the decisions arising from the study as soon as possible thereafter.

Equipment Exhibition

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who will be opening the Royal Navy and British Army Equipment Exhibition. [1742]

Mr. Spellar: The Royal Navy and British Army Equipment Exhibition is normally opened by one of the Defence ministers. A decision about who will open this year's exhibition will be made nearer the time.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Attorney-General what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1239]

The Attorney-General: The Departments for which I am responsible have conducted surveys of their computer systems for the purpose of addressing millennium compliance. Modification and testing is proceeding according to plan, with a view to ensuring compliance by the end of next year.

All new systems include millennium compliance as a standard specification in the operational requirement.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Intestacy

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster how many people have died intestate and had their estates transferred to the Duchy of Lancaster in each year since 1992. [1204]

Dr. David Clark: Figures for the years 1992 to 1994 were given to my hon. Friend in a written answer on 7 June 1995, *Official Report* columns 258–259. Figures for the six month period 1 October 1994 to 31 March 1995 and for the year 1995—96 are as follows.

The number of intestate estates, the value of which, after disposal of assets, was transferred to the Duchy of Lancaster and which are referred to as 'closed cases' was as follows:

1 October 1994 to 31 March 1995: 75.

1995–1996: 305.

The number of cases reported to the Solicitor for the affairs of the Duchy of Lancaster for the same period was:

1 October 1994 to 31 March 1995: 148.

1995–1996: 405.

The number of estates which devolved to surviving blood relatives—kin—for the same period was:

1 October 1994 to 31 March 1995: 22.

1995–1996: 73.

The six month period 1 October 1994 to 31 March 1995 was due to a change in the Duchy accounting year.

Records are maintained by reference to the date of reporting and of closing cases, not necessarily to the date of death.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1658]

Dr. David Clark: Our manifesto commits us to establishing

"comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or at work, developed in partnership with all interested parties".

We shall be consulting widely with other Government Departments and developing proposals in partnership with disability organisations, employers, employer organisations, trade unions and others. An essential issue will be the definition of disability. It is not appropriate for me to pre-empt the outcome of that consultation.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(d)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1657]

Dr. David Clark: The Cabinet Office (OPS) and its agencies has five publications available in either braille, audio tape or large print.

Name of publication	*Availability*	*Publicity*
Know Where You Stand	Braille and audio tape	Press Release and also distributed to: MP's, Racial Equality Councils, NACAB, Libraries, Federation of Independent Advice Centres, Community Health Councils, Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation.
Citizen's Charter Complaint's Task Force: Putting Things Right Executive Summary	Braille, audio tape and large print	Not published.
Explaining the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information	Braille, audio tape and large print	Distributed to Government Departments, Citizens Advice Bureau and libraries.
The equal opportunities magazine—JIGSAW	Braille and large print	Equal Opportunities Practitioners, Disabled Civil Servants and the Internet.
Benchmarking Human Resource Activities—Consortium Project	Audio tape	Publicised at the launch of the report on 14 March 1997 and subsequently in a letter to all the OPS Board, CCSU, PEFOs, training contacts in Departments and Agencies.

Benevolent Fund

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list the donations given by the Duchy of Lancaster Benevolent Fund to persons and organisations in Pendle for each year since 1992. [1200]

Mr. David Clark: I would point out to my hon. Friend that I am not a trustee of the Duchy Benevolent Fund. Audited accounts of the fund are forwarded to the Charity Commissioners each year. I understand that it is the policy of the trustees not to give details of individual recipients who receive grants from the Duchy Benevolent Fund although the trustees have no objection to recipients giving this information. In order to help my hon. Friend, the secretary of the fund has provided details of total amounts paid to organisations and individuals in the Pendle area from the Benevolent Fund for the past four years:

1993: £250

1994: £1,400

1995: £1,500

1996: £5,170.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has for the reprogramming of computers and technical equipment in Government departments to address the year 2000 problem. [1449]

Mr. Kilfoyle: This is essentially the responsibility of individual departments. However my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has recently written to all ministerial heads of Department to ensure that they are aware of the arrangements which exist for dealing with the year 2000 date change problem.

From within the Cabinet Office (OPS) departments are supported by the Central Information Technology Unit (CITU) and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA). As part of that support CITU and CCTA have identified a programme of action to ensure that the Government's response to the year 2000 problem is co-ordinated and coherent. This involves each department in producing a detailed and costed action plan by October to ensure that all their systems are modified and tested by January 1999.

The recent National Audit Office report, "Managing the Millennium Threat", demonstrated that the public sector was doing as well as the private sector in tackling the problem, however, there is no room for complacency.

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to ensure that civil servants take all steps necessary to ensure that Government computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1232]

Mr. Kilfoyle: It is the responsibility of individual departments to ensure that their computer systems are millennium compliant. Departments are satisfied that they have sufficiently skilled staff to tackle the problem.

Departments are supported from the Cabinet Office (OPS) by the Central Information Technology Unit (CITU) and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA). As part of that support CITU and CCTA have identified a programme of action to ensure that Government's response to the year 2000 problem is co-ordinated and coherent and that all systems are modified and tested by January 1999.

The CCTA has also produced a six volume set of guides covering every aspect of starting, managing and successfully implementing a full year 2000 compliance programme. The set, called "Tackling the Year 2000", forms the most detailed impartial guidance available to date.

The recent report by the National Audit Office, "Managing the Millennium Threat", shows that the public sector had work well underway to deal with the millennium date change.

Charters

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list those charters where non-compliance with charter standards trigger financial compensation, indicating the specific relevant targets. [1107]

Dr. David Clark: The information is as follows.

Charter	*Details*
London Underground's Customer Charter	If a customer is delayed for more than 15 minutes because of London Underground's failure, they will give the customer a refund voucher to the value of the delayed journey;
Northern Ireland Railways Passenger's Charter	Allows compensation in the form of discounts on season tickets if Northern Ireland Railways fail by more than a small margin to meet their punctuality and reliability standards. For people not eligible for season ticket discounts, it allows compensation if a train is seriously delayed or cancelled, or if a seat reservation is not honoured. For all qualifying claims, a minimum discount of £1 is offered;
25 franchise-specific charters for the rail industry in Great Britain	Each must have terms as least as favourable to passengers as those under British Rail's old Passenger's Charter, which ceased to exist on 1 April 1997, when franchise arrangements for the rail industry came into full effect. It allowed compensation in the form of discounts on season tickets if British Rail failed by more than a small margin to meet their punctuality and reliability standards. For people not eligible for season ticket discounts, it allowed compensation if a train was seriously delayed or cancelled, or if a seat or sleeper reservation was not honoured.

There are also departmental payments made under special circumstances which are not directly linked to charters, for example, the Inland Revenue's compensation for "serious error" as defined in the "Code of Practice *Mistakes by the Inland Revenue*". Other departments with special payment schemes are HM Customs & Excise, the Benefits Agency, the Contributions Agency, and the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Business Links

Liz Blackman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what proposals she has to reform the Business Links network to make it more responsive to the needs of small and medium size businesses; [1533]

(2) what assessment she has made of the current effectiveness of the Business Links network in supporting small and medium size businesses. [1532]

Mrs. Roche: Improving the Business Link service to small and medium sized businesses is one of my key priorities. I am committed to ensuring that all Business Links deliver a service which is of the highest quality. Many are already doing so, and I am discussing with officials and with the national Business Link partners how we can ensure that all Business Links are brought up to the standard of the best.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Liz Blackman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to reform the loan guarantee scheme to encourage the development of the small and medium-sized business sector. [1562]

Mrs. Roche: As a priority I will be examining ways in which the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme can do more to help small and medium sized high technology businesses.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make it her policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if she will make a statement. [1680]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Department of Trade and Industry is committed to participating fully in development of policy of comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people. Overall responsibility for disability is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Water Cannon

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade which strategic export control category is used to identify marker dye used in the Tactica water cannon; and if she will list the countries in respect of which such licences have been granted in each year since 1992. [1833]

Mrs. Roche: Marker dye is not subject to export control.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the export control categories under which water cannon have been categorised. [1848]

Mrs. Roche: PL5001.e of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended, or ML6 of that Order where mounted on a vehicle specially designed or modified for military use.

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many water cannon exported to Indonesia have received Export Credits Guarantee Department cover. [1849]

Mrs. Roche: Sixteen.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the proposed statutory national minimum wage, once implemented, will be index-linked to *(a)* the retail prices index or *(b)* average earnings. [847]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The independent Low Pay Commission will recommend to Government the initial level of the National Minimum Wage, according to the

economic circumstance of the time, and will have responsibility for reviewing the level of the Minimum Wage.

Bananas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her policy in respect of the measures proposed by the European Parliament to preserve the market position of Eastern Caribbean bananas against competition from bananas produced in central and South America. [1050]

Mrs. Roche: The position of Eastern Caribbean banana imports into the EU market is closely related to the special provisions of the EU banana regime. This regime is currently the subject of dispute settlement proceedings in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which are not yet completed. The Parliament's views on Commission proposals for changes to the regime will be taken into account when the Council of Ministers comes to decide on the future of the regime in the light of the final outcome of the current WTO dispute.

The Government are conscious of our historic commitments to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) banana producers, including those in the Eastern Caribbean, and of our obligations as members of the WTO.

Piece Workers

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she plans that the statutory national minimum wage will include provisions for piece workers; and if she will make a statement. [1774]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Gracious Speech made clear our commitment to the introduction of legislation to set in place a National Minimum Wage which will provide a wage floor for employees, including those employed as pieceworkers. It will be set sensibly with the advice of the independent Low Pay Commission.

Working Time Directive

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she expects to implement the working time directive; and if she will make a statement on its extension to transport workers. [1128]

Mr. Ian McCartney: We shall implement the Working Time Directive without any further avoidable delay. The European Commission are expected to publish a White Paper on options for dealing with the sectors of activity excluded from the Directive shortly.

Genetically Engineered Animals

Mr. Etherington: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list all United Kingdom patents that have been *(a)* applied for and *(b)* granted since 1 July 1995 in respect of genetically engineered animals and processes for creating such animals. [1119]

Mr. Battle: I can only give information about patent applications which have been published. Prior to publication such information is confidential. There have been a total of three patent applications filed under the 1977 Patents Act and published since 1 July 1995 relating to genetically engineered animals and processes for preparing them. Patent application No. GB 2295395 relates to an animal model for Alzheimer's disease, application No. GB 2291646 relates to transgenic fish and application No. GB 2288807 relates to transgenic animals expressing an insecticidal protein. None of these applications have yet been granted. One application, namely GB 2265909, which was made before 1 July 1995 and which relates to a process for producing transgenic animals, has since been granted. This information covers only applications filed at the UK Patent Office and does not include applications filed at the European Patent Office and which may have the legal effect of UK patents when granted by that Office.

Post Offices

Mr. David Heath: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans she has to intervene to prevent the closure of Crown post offices and their replacement by franchised facilities when such closures are not supported by the local community. [1560]

(2) if she will intervene to stop the proposed closure by Post Office Counters Ltd. of Frome Post Office and its replacement by franchised facilities. [1559]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I announced on 16 May a comprehensive review of options for implementing the Government's election manifesto pledge to grant the Post Office greater commercial freedom. In the context of this review, I also announced that the Post Office had, at my request, agreed to suspend its programme of converting Crown post office to agency status—except where irreversible contractual commitments already existed—until we are in a position to make informed decisions. The proposal to convert the Crown post office in Frome has therefore been suspended.

Low Pay Commission

Mr. Healey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if a decision has been made on the chairmanship of the Low Pay Commission. [1907]

Mrs. Beckett: I am pleased to announce that Professor George Bain, currently Principal of the London Business School, has accepted the Government's invitation to chair the Low Pay Commission.

Konver

Mr. Key: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons European Commission non-objective area Konver expenditure on the Navy, Army and Air Force Institution re-employment programme at Amesbury has been stopped; and if he will make a statement. [1093]

Mrs. Roche: It is a requirement of the Konver II Programme that expenditure in non Objective 1, 2 and 5(b) areas, for the UK as a whole, cannot exceed 50 per cent. of the total Konver II programme allocation. To ensure that this limit would not be breached, the Konver II Programme Monitoring Committee agreed at their last meeting, that commitments to projects in these areas needed to be put on hold whilst ceilings on expenditure were being considered. Following discussions with the Government Offices and relevant Government Departments, the applicants in the South West have been

advised that commitments in these areas can now be resumed. Subject to final approvals, a commitment of funds to this project is expected shortly.

Bosnia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what support her Department offers to British companies wishing to bid for reconstruction projects in the Republic of Bosnia Herzegovina; and if she will make a statement. [1452]

Mrs. Roche: Reconstruction projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina are funded principally by the World Bank, European bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Commission. Information on these, and other multilateral aid funded projects, is held by the World Aid Section of my Department and is available to all British companies.

More generally, my Department has also promoted awareness among British companies of the opportunities—both general and specific—arising out of the international reconstruction effort in Bosnia through, among other initiatives, the mounting of conferences and seminars. My Department also provides regular updates on the latest commercial and political developments to companies which have expressed an interest in reconstruction opportunities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Alcohol Tax (Japan)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the current level of taxation being levied by Japan on *(a)* Scotch whisky and *(b)* scochi; and if he will make a statement on convergence of taxation. [1365]

Mrs. Roche: As the question asks about convergence of liquor tax rates in Japan, a clear reference to the recent dispute over Japan's discriminatory taxation of foreign spirits compared with Japanese shochu, this answer assumes that the reference to "scochi" is a mistranscription of "shochu".

The current level of taxation levied by Japan on Scotch whisky of 40° of alcohol is 982,300 Yen per kilolitre (¥/KL) and on shochu of 25° of alcohol is 155,700 ¥/KL. However, as a result of negotiations between the EU and Japan to end discriminatory taxation of foreign spirits, the taxation on Scotch whisky will fall by 44 per cent. on 1 October 1997 to 551,000 ¥/KL and fall again on 1 October 1998 to 409,000 ¥/KL. Taxation on shochu will rise on 1 October 1997 to 201,900 ¥/KL and rise again on 1 October 1998 to 248,100 ¥/KL. A further transition period is granted for one type of shochu (shochu B). This will mean that once these changes are fully implemented the tax differential on a tax rate per kilolitre per degree of alcohol basis will be reduced from around 600 per cent. to just 3 per cent. for Scotch whisky, whilst taxation rates for shochu and white spirits will be equalised. The Scotch Whisky Association estimate that this will be worth some £75 million every year.

Furthermore, the WTO ruling obtained in reaching this settlement provides a useful precedent for tackling discriminatory taxation in other countries. As a result, the EU is already undertaking WTO consultations with the South Korean Government and have proposed initiating WTO consultations with Chile.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Education Qualifications

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if RSA Stage II is equivalent to at least GCSE grade C for purposes of employment or entry into further education. [50]

Mr. Worthington: There are no general equivalents between RSA Stage II and GCSE at grade C and above as the course content, assessment methods and standards required may differ. Work is currently under way between the various examining bodies, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority in relation to the placing and equivalence of all qualifications within the National Framework recommended by Sir Ron Dearing.

Civil Service (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many civil servants, of each grade, in her Department, were of Asian origin, on 5 May. [734]

Mr. Murphy: The Northern Ireland Office is based in both London and Northern Ireland, and employs staff from the Home Civil Service and the Northern Ireland Civil Service groups. Monitoring of ethnic origin is currently limited to Home Civil Service employees in Great Britain. As at 5 May 1997, there were eight employees, up to Grade 7, out of an eligible monitoring group of 108, who had identified themselves as being of Asian origin.

It is not possible to provide the information requested in respect of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The Northern Ireland Civil Service monitors its workforce in terms of religion, sex and disability. It does not undertake any ethnic monitoring of its workforce. The Service will be reviewing its monitoring policies to take account of the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and the guidance on best practice which will be produced following its implementation.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals she has to increase the number of ethnic minority employees in her Department. [735]

Mr. Murphy: The Northern Ireland Office staff group includes 108 Home Civil Service employees based in London who are eligible for ethnic monitoring. Over the last three years there has been a 6 per cent. increase, to 19.5 per cent., in the number of employees who have identified themselves as being of Black or Asian origin. Recruitment sources have included inter-departmental trawis, absorption of surplus staff from other departments and the use of the Recruitment and Assessment Service instant recruitment scheme. The Northern Ireland Office will continue to use all of these methods to meet its obligations to recruit on the basis of fair and open competition.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service is committed to ensuring equality opportunity in employment irrespective of any extraneous factors not pertinent to job requirements. The NICS equal opportunities policy embraces all staff and applicants for employment, including those who are members of ethnic minority groups.

Mosque, Craigavon

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations she has received from *(a)* the Royal Ulster Constabulary and *(b)* other regarding the incidents of fire and theft at the Mosque in Craigavon, County Armagh. [745]

Mr. Ingram: No representations have been received regarding this matter.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the *(a)* maximum, *(b)* minimum and *(c)* average payment made under the arable area payments scheme in 1996–97. [1721]

Mr. Murphy: Maximum, minimum and average payments made under the Arable Area Payments Scheme in Northern Ireland in 1996–97 were *(a)* maximum—£61,772.70, *(b)* minimum—£73.32 and *(c)* average—£2,6111.87.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Uganda

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to visit Uganda. [1458]

Clare Short: While I have no firms plans for a visit to Uganda at this stage, I hope to visit in the coming months.

Tanzania

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to review British aid to Tanzania. [1490]

Clare Short: As part of the Department's comprehensive spending review, we are reviewing all our expenditure programmes, including that in Tanzania.

Aid Recipients

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the countries in receipt of aid from the United Kingdom, indicating the level of grant aid given to each. [1463]

Clare Short: Britain gives bilateral aid to over 160 countries. All new bilateral aid is provided on grant terms. Details are set out in Table 7 of the 1996 edition of British Aid Statistics (deposited in the Library of the House in January 1997). These and other countries also benefit from UK contributions to the multilateral development institutions of which we are a member.

Afghanistan

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has received from non-Governmental organisations working in Afghanistan regarding freedom of access for women in Taliban-held areas. [1450]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development supports the work of many non-governmental agencies in Afghanistan and has consulted closely with them on the question of human rights.

We subscribe to the common donor position that all parties in Afghanistan should recognise, protect and promote the equal rights and dignity of men and women, including access to education, employment outside the home, personal security and freedom from intimidation and harassment.

Bangladesh

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what emergency aid she intends to make available to the Government of Bangladesh following the recent cyclone. [1476]

Clare Short: Following consultations with the Government of Bangladesh we have approved grants totalling £212,000 to NGOs to provide assistance for shelter for families in the worst-affected areas. We will consider further grants to Government or NGOs as needs become clearer.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development by what means her Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape, and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1659]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development produces only a small number of publications most of which are for educational purposes only. Consideration has been given in the past to producing publications for the visually handicapped but insufficient demand has so far been identified. We will keep the question under review.

UNESCO

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the allocation of funding for the UK membership of UNESCO. [1094]

Clare Short: Our first contribution to UNESCO about £5 million covering the period 1 July—31 December 1997, will be met from the contingency reserve in the development budget. Future contributions will be considered in the next resources round. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham, (Mr. Hogg) *Hansard* 20 May 1997, column *37*.

Iran

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number of refugees in Iran and *(b)* the countries from which these refugees have come; and what assistance she is providing to those refugees. [1339]

Clare Short: Current estimates are that there are 1.4 million Afghan refugees and 580,000 Iraqi refugees in Iran.

In the last three financial years, the UK Government has spent in Iran, £10,065 million on Afghan refugees, £422,000 on Kurdish refugees and £685,000 on other Iraqi refugees.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to ensure that her Department's computer systems will be millennium compliant; and if she will make a statement. [1251]

Clare Short: The core computer systems of the Department will be millennium compliant by October 1998. We are currently investigating the smaller systems. A costed action plan to ensure the compliance of the latter will be available this October.

Superspecs

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the recent trial in Ghana of a newly invented self-adjusting pair of spectacles known as superspecs; and if she will make a statement. [1323]

Clare Short: The technology looks a promising way of tackling impaired eyesight in developing low income countries. We are continuing to support field testing, an introductory marketing programme, and, further development of the design and manufacturing technology of the adaptive spectacles to the point where they can be produced commercially in significant quantities.

Montserrat

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid the Government are providing to the people of Montserrat in respect of damage caused by the recent hurricane; and if she will make a statement. [1746]

Clare Short: I shall write to the hon. Member shortly.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

BBC Governors

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans she has to alter the number of the BBC governors; and what criteria he will use for the appointment of governors in the future. [1457]

Mr. Fisher: We have no current plans to alter the number of BBC Governors. Governors are appointed by Her Majesty The Queen on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. In giving advice on possible candidates, my right hon. Friend will seek to ensure that the body of Governors represents the interests of the population as a whole and that it has the authority and skills needed for its major public service role. He will also apply the principles established by the Nolan Committee as set out in guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proposals he has to make the governors of the BBC more accountable to the public. [1456]

Mr. Fisher: As a public corporation, the BBC must be accountable to its audiences, to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, the custodian of its Charter and Agreement, and to Parliament. My right hon. Friend will be considering how the accountability of the BBC might be underscored, within the existing framework of the Charter and Agreement, in preparing his response to the National Heritage Select Committee's report, "The BBC and the Future of Broadcasting".

Television Licences

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Nnational Heritage what plans he has to review the cost of TV licences for pensioners on low incomes. [1827]

Mr. Fisher: The Government currently has no plans to review the concessionary television licence fee regulations.

National Lottery

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to use lottery funds to help end street homelessness in Britain by 2000. [1641]

Mr. Banks: The National Lottery Charities Board has already announced 446 grants with a total value of £66 million for projects to assist homeless people. Its fifth grant programme, targeted at improving people's living environment, specifically aims to tackle homelessness and its effects. The Government will also build on the Rough Sleepers Initiative, providing accommodation, outreach work and resettlement support, to ensure that there is no need for people to sleep rough.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what proportion of proceeds from the national lottery have gone to projects in the east midlands; and what plans he has to ensure additional national lottery proceeds are devoted to projects in the east midlands; [1460]

(2) what assessment he has made of the imbalance of allocation of national lottery funds between different regions; what steps he has taken to address imbalances of allocation; and if he will make a statement. [1459]

Mr. Banks: To date, 4 per cent. of the £3.373 billion awarded by National Lottery distributing bodies has been for projects in the East Midlands. It is clear that some areas of the country have benefited a great deal more from the Lottery than others. We will be looking at the reasons for this as part of our overall review of Lottery distribution and considering what changes might be made as a result.

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will review the operation of commercial organisations offering services claiming to help people improve their chances of winning national lottery prizes; and if he will make a statement. [1435]

Mr. Banks: The selection of the winning numbers in the National Lottery is a random process and any claim that a commercial product will improve the chances of winning must therefore be false. There are products available which aim to assist players in choosing their numbers randomly. It is a matter for players to decide whether or not they wish to purchase such products.

Anyone who felt they had been misled by such a product would have recourse to the courts or local trading standards officers.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if the proposed review of national lottery funding will include increased flexibility for grant applications for village halls within metropolitan areas. [1210]

Mr. Chris Smith: National Lottery distributing bodies are able to consider bids for improvements to, or the creation of, village halls or community facilities in any part of the United Kingdom. The distributors have produced a joint publication, 'Village and Community Halls–Guidance from the National Lottery distributing bodies', which offers advice to potential applicants. We will consider the need for greater flexibility over applications as part of our review of all aspects of the Lottery distribution system.

Tourist Boards

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has for increasing the English Tourist Board's funding to match that of the other tourist boards. [1653]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I shall be considering the funding for the English Tourist Board, and for the British Tourist Authority, alongside that for all the other areas for which I am responsible, in due course. Government support for tourism takes many forms, and cannot be measured solely in terms of grant to the tourist boards.

Seaside Piers

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to improve the state of Britain's seaside piers, with particular reference to Southport's pier. [1654]

Mr. Banks: Public funding for the restoration of historic piers is available from English Heritage (or the equivalent agency in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland) and from the National Heritage Memorial Fund. The NHMF has so far provided £3.3 million from Lottery proceeds for projects relating to historic piers. This includes a grant of £34,000 in February this year for a structural survey of Southport pier. I understand that the possibility of European Regional Development Fund support for the restoration of this pier is also under discussion.

Millennium Celebrations (East Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what millennium celebrations are planned for east Lancashire. [1205]

Mr. Chris Smith: The Government expect that individuals and communities throughout the country will wish to organise their own celebrations to mark the Millennium, and I am sure there will be many such events in east Lancashire. The Millennium Commission has funded a number of projects in east Lancashire. These include the South Meadow Lane Centre in Preston, which has been awarded a grant of £1, 640,000; the Ribble Link project to create a new 5-mile stretch of canal linking some of the remaining green spaces in Preston, which has been awarded grant of £2,700,000; and the Forest of Burnley project, which has been awarded grant of £1,775,549.

The Commission has also funded umbrella projects covering the whole of the UK, such as the National Cycle Network, Millennium Greens and 21st Century Halls. Ten Churches in east Lancashire have reached stage two of the Church Floodlighting Trust, including St. Peter and St. Paul in Blackburn and St. James in Altham.

WALES

Dyslexia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to increase provision for those children who are dyslexic; and if he will make a statement. [630]

Mr. Hain: Local education authorities and schools are responsible for ensuring that appropriate provision is made for children with special educational needs, including those who are dyslexic. The Welsh Office is continuing to make funds available to LEAs for the training of teachers of children with dyslexia, under the Grants for Education Support and Training (GEST) Programme. I will welcome views from the hon. Member.

Education Costs

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average annual cost of educating *(a)* a primary school pupil and *(b)* a secondary school pupil in Wales. [647]

Mr. Hain: The latest available information for Wales is for the financial year 1994–95. The expenditure per pupil in 1994–95 on LEA maintained nursery and primary schools in Wales was £1,637. The corresponding figure for LEA maintained secondary schools was £2,264.

Cancelled Operations

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many operations were cancelled on the day of, or the day after, admission to hospital by *(a)* health authority and *(b)* overall; and how many of those patients were not readmitted within a month for the fourth quarter of 1996–97. [793]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information about the number of operations cancelled on the day of, or the day after admission is not collected centrally. The number of patients who were not readmitted within a month is not collected from individual health authorities. The overall figure for the number of patients not readmitted to Welsh hospitals within a month of a cancelled operation in the fourth quarter of 1996–97 was 413.

GP Surgeries

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what incentive schemes *(a)* currently exist and *(b)* are being examined by his Department, to encourage general practitioners to set up surgeries in the valleys of South Wales. [860]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I hope to make an announcement within a few weeks.

Community Doctors

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the availability of community doctors in Wales. [861]

Mr. Win Griffiths: None. The responsibility for the establishment of posts in community medicine is a matter for health authorities or trusts to consider having regard to locally assessed needs and circumstances.

Long-term Care

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to deal with problems relating to long-term care. [1113]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. and learned Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health on 20 May 1997, *Official Report*, column *58*.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to take to reduce waiting lists; and if he will make a statement. [1112]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Alongside the top priority of managing medical admissions, and ensuring that adequate intensive care facilities are available, I intend that cutting waiting lists and reducing waiting times will continue to be a key priority for the NHS in Wales.

I expect the resources released through efficiency gains and the majority of the £1.9 million released by the suspension of 8th wave fundholding to be invested in these areas and in the improvement of local services for cancer patients.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage of general practitioners are fundholders; and how many applications are outstanding. [1111]

Mr. Win Griffiths: There are 923 GPs (54 per cent.), in 233 GP Fundholding practices in Wales. A further 11 practices have expressed interest in the 8th Wave, but have not yet made formal application. I have decided to defer any approval of the 8th Wave until July 1998.

Nurses (North Wales)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide assistance to allow the North Wales health authority and North Wales hospital trusts to introduce more nurses. [1114]

Mr. Win Griffiths: No. Financial allocations for 1997–98 have already been made to the North Wales Health Authority.

River Pollution

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to reduce river pollution in Wales. [1303]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The latest information published by the Environment Agency shows that 91.4 per cent. of Welsh rivers are classified as good quality; 6.9 per cent. as fair; with only 1.7 per cent. classed as poor or bad quality. This compares with similar percentages of 59.5, 31.5 and 9.0 for the whole of England and Wales. The Government is committed to protecting the environment, including our rivers, and will put concern for the environment at the heart of future policy making.

Beef Market

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has for support for the beef market; and if he will make a statement. [1206]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Government wishes to ensure the long term viability of the beef market. Any changes to support arrangements will be made as part of a strategy to ensure a sustainable beef industry in Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the *(a)* maximum, *(b)* minimum and *(c)* average payment made under the arable area payments scheme in 1996–97. [1725]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The maximum payment made for a claim under the 1996 Arable Area Payment Scheme in Wales was for £142,497. The minimum payment was £148, and the average payment £5,025.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the future of compulsory competitive tendering in Wales in advance of the introduction of a duty on local authorities to achieve best value. [1906]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have considered representations about the continuing difficulties that local authorities in Wales are facing in preparing for the reintroduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) given the pressures of reorganisation. I am of the view that I should take action to relieve these difficulties.

I intend to consult widely on a range of measures which I have in mind to achieve this objective while maintaining the pressure on local authorities to secure efficiencies in the delivery of services.

I propose to extend the moratorium on CCT until 1 October 1998.

Under the terms of the current moratorium, CCT has been generally suspended for work subject to the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980 (the 1980 Act) and for activities covered by the Local Government Act 1988 (the 1988 Act). Throughout the moratorium period, CCT has continued to apply to works of construction under the 1980 Act where the value of the work exceeds £500,000. Under my proposals this requirement will continue to apply during the extended moratorium.

I will also continue to require local authorities to produce annual reports and to meet the financial objective specified under current CCT legislation (the 1980 and 1988 Acts) where work is carried out in-house during the

extended moratorium. My Department will continue to monitor authorities' performance throughout the extended moratorium and will take appropriate action if authorities fail to submit reports or achieve the financial objective.

Under my proposals, on which I shall be consulting, CCT would be reintroduced from October 1998 for further elements of work covered by the 1980 Act. The purpose would be to extend the range of work beyond those large construction contracts which were subject to CCT under the terms of the moratorium. CCT for the remainder of work subject to the 1980 Act, and all activities subject to the 1988 Act, would be implemented on a phased and manageable basis during 1999.

With colleagues, I will be reviewing the existing CCT framework and will reassess the arrangements proposed for Wales in the light of the outcome of that review.

Our Manifesto gave a commitment to replace CCT with a duty on local authorities to achieve best value. While work on this is taken forward, I will encourage local authorities to take a positive view on the value of competitive tendering and to conclude properly those tendering exercises which are nearing completion.

I will also ask the Welsh Local Government Association to work with my Department, the Audit Commission and other Government Departments to develop a framework for piloting important features of a best value regime in advance of its formal introduction on a statutory basis.

HEALTH

Disclosure of Information

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will remove the right of NHS trusts to refuse to provide information as to their activities on the basis of such information being commercial in confidence. [26]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service is expected to respond positively to all requests for information. However, there may be circumstances where negotiations could be prejudiced by premature disclosure or where there is a duty to respect information given in confidence.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a requirement on NHS trusts and health authorities to publish their business plans and planning documents relating to the services they provide or plan to provide. [28]

Mr. Milburn: National Health Service trusts and health authorities are expected to be open about their plans. They are required to make publicly available details about important proposals or health policies or changes in the way in which services are delivered. This information should be made available when proposals are announced, and before decisions are made. In addition, trusts are required to publish an annual business plan, describing their planned activity for the coming year. Both trusts and health authorities are also required to publish a summary strategic direction document (every three years for trusts and five years for health authorities) setting out their longer term plans for the delivery of health care services.

Civil Service (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many civil servants at each grade within his Department were of Asian origin on 5 May. [233]

Ms Jowell: The figures on 5 May 1997 were as follows:

As a percentage of staff in the payband

Payband	*Number*	*Percentage*
IP1	62	5
IP2 and Fast Stream	42	4
IP3	20	2
IP4 and above including Senior Civil Service	14	1
Total	138	3

These figures include data for the National Health Service Executive regional offices and the agencies. The figures for the Fast Stream payband and the Senior Civil Service have been amalgamated with other groups because of the small numbers involved, so as to ensure that individuals cannot be identified.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the financial information in respect of outstanding PFI bids for NHS hospital development contracts. [17]

Mr. Milburn: Information relating to outstanding Private Finance Initiative proposals may be made available from the National Health Service trusts concerned unless it affects on going negotiations. Additionally, NHS trusts must publish and make publicly available an annual report and audited accounts. Trusts have a requirement to include in their annual report a statement regarding PFI proposals and actions. In addition, trusts are required to analyse the impact of all significant items, including PFI deals, in the audited accounts.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the specifications for PFI-funded projects in *(a)* their original outline and *(b)* their current form. [19]

Mr. Milburn: Information on original and current specifications for capital investment projects may be obtained from the National Health Service trusts concerned, providing that it does not affect commercial negotiations.

Health Authority Funding

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each English health authority its deficit or surplus for 1996–97, its projected deficit or surplus for 1997–98 and the increase or decrease in its waiting lists over the last available year. [776]

Mr. Milburn: The information on the latest estimated surplus/deficit for 1996–97, of each English health authority will be placed in the Library. Plans for 1997–98 are still being agreed. Waiting list figures for each current English health authority are available from June 1996 and the latest available are for 31 December 1996, both of which have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health authorities have reported deficit problems relating to their funding arrangements in *(a)* the current and *(b)* the previous year. [1517]

Mr. Milburn: I refer my hon. Friend to the replies given to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) today.

Health authorities have a statutory responsibility to ensure that their net expenditure remains within their allocated cash limit. In 1996–97 all health authorities achieved this. All health authorities are required to remain within their cash limit for 1997–98.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date the problems of deficits currently having to be considered by ministers were first drawn to the attention of his Department. [1519]

Mr. Milburn: The National Health Service Executive monitors the performance of health authorities and trusts continually as part of a cycle of planning and regular monitoring reviews. Information on the financial position of health authorities and trusts is published quarterly and was placed in the Library on 17 March in response to a request from my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Bayley).

Health Service Deficits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health trusts and health authorities were in deficit on 1 April; and by what amounts. [1027]

Mr. Milburn: Plans for 1997–98 are still being agreed. Information on the 1996–97 quarter 4 position of all health authorities and trusts have been placed in the Library.

Ethnic Minority NHS Staff

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of *(a)* NHS managers, *(b)* general practitioners, *(c)* consultants/registrars and *(d)* nurses, by grade, are from ethnic minority backgrounds; and what steps he proposes to take to increase their numbers. [1046]

Mr. Milburn: Information about the ethnic origin of National Health Service hospital & community health services managers, nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and hospital medical staff (including consultants and registrars) is contained in "NHS hospital and community health services non-medical workforce census; England as at September 1995: ethnic group tables" and "Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Service Medical and Dental staff in England 1985 to 1995", copies of which are available in the Library.

The Department has not collected data on ethnic origins of general practitioners or their staff to date. However, the Department holds data on Unrestricted Principals[1] by their country of qualification: 17 per cent. of Unrestricted Principals qualified outside the European Economic Area at 1 October 1995.

Chairs and Chief Executives of NHS trusts and health authorities are accountable for meeting the goals of "Ethnic minority staff in the NHS: a programme of action", the overall aim of which is to secure fair representation of ethnic minorities at all levels in the health service. Progress towards these goals forms part of the "NHS as a good employer" benchmark set out in the annual Priorities and Planning guidance, and the NHS Executive is working at a national level to promote and disseminate best practice.

[1] An Unrestricted Principal is a practitioner who provides the full range of general medical services and whose list is not limited to any particular group of persons.
Source: GP Census.

Coffee (Heart Disease)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has evaluated into possible links between the fatty material in coffee beans and the incidence of heart disease; and if he will make a statement. [1329]

Ms Jowell: In 1994 the Department published the Report of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy on the nutritional aspects of cardiovascular disease, copies of which are available in the Library. The committee concluded that the evidence that caffeine or coffee consumption may contribute to the development of coronary heart disease (CHD) remains inconsistent and that coffee drinking as practised in the United Kingdom does not appear to affect CHD risk. The Department is aware of more recent Scandinavian research on the capacity of some components present in unfiltered, boiled coffee to raise blood cholesterol, and on the effect of method of preparation on its content of them. Given the different coffee drinking patterns in the UK, it is not clear whether this Scandinavian research is relevant to the incidence of heart disease in the UK.

NHS Trusts (Disciplinary Procedures)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the disciplinary procedures of NHS trusts with particular reference to offering trust employees the protection provided in paragraphs 189–90 of the 1994 Whitley Council Terms and Conditions of Service. [1337]

Mr. Milburn: The General Whitley Council protocol on disciplinary procedures was promulgated in February 1995 following the agreement of the Staff Side of the Council. The protocol aims to ensure disciplinary matters are resolved as quickly as possible at local employer level. There are no plans at present to review the procedures.

Drug Misuse Services

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the level of public funding for drug misuse services; what assessment he has made of the impact of the new methodology for allocating resources for drug misuse services on the level of funding allocated for East Lancashire; and if he will make a statement. [1439]

Ms Jowell: We have received a number of representations about the level of funding for drug misuse services. No particular assessment has been made of the impact on the new methodology for allocating resources for drug misuse services on the level of funding allocated for East Lancashire. The special allocation for drug

misuse nationally has increased by over 9 per cent. in real terms in 1997–98 and the allocation to East Lancashire has increased by over 7 per cent.

Lariam

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious illnesses resulting from the use of lariam. [1486]

Ms Jowell: The Medicines Control Agency receives reports of suspected adverse reactions to licensed medicinal products via the Yellow Card Scheme. A report of a suspected reaction does not necessarily mean that it was caused by the medicine. However, as the scheme is voluntary, not all adverse reactions are reported.

There have been 685 reports of 910 suspected serious adverse reactions reported in association with mefloquine. Of these adverse reactions, 653 were neurological or psychiatric. The majority of these reactions were not clinically severe. The commonest reactions reported were depression, headache, anxiety and panic reactions. These are included as possible side-effects in the product information, which is provided to health professionals and patients.

Four deaths have been reported in association with mefloquine. Three are likely to be related to factors other than treatment with mefloquine. One patient died of a serious skin reaction which is very rare, but recognised as occurring in association with mefloquine and many other drugs.

Non-clinical Services

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact the Government's proposed changes in employment law will have on NHS employees providing non-clinical services; and if he will make a statement. [1293]

Mr. Milburn: The independent Low Pay Commission will recommend to the Government the initial level at which the National Minimum Wage might be set. It is too soon to say what the impact might be on National Health Service employees.

Care Beds

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many continuing or long-stay care beds were commissioned by each health authority in each year since 1993. [1333]

Mr. Boateng: Data are collected by broad ward classification rather than by clinical specialty in returns by individual National Health Service providers rather than by health authority. The complete set of data is available from the Library in the publication "Bed Availability for England" but there is no separate classification of continuing care or long stay care beds. One of the actions we have already taken is to ask officials to review the collection of continuing care commissioning data by health and local authorities.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1247]

Mr. Milburn: The Department has carried out an inventory of all its computer systems and has produced an initial high level plan to address the problem. Testing for Year 2000 compliance will start in June. A fully costed, timed and prioritised programme of remedial work will be prepared in the Autumn.

Adoptions Procedure

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reduce the *(a)* bureaucracy, *(b)* time and *(c)* cost involved in adoptions procedure. [1346]

Mr. Boateng: The Government intend to introduce new adoption legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Human Growth Hormone

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have contracted Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease as a result of the cadaveric human growth hormone programme in Britain. [1810]

Ms Jowell: Twenty-one patients who were treated with human growth hormone in the United Kingdom have died of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. A further four are currently exhibiting symptoms consistent with the disease.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will consider no-fault compensation for those suffering illness as a result of the cadaveric human growth hormone programme. [1812]

Ms Jowell: I will write to my hon. Friend about this shortly.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what compensation has so far been awarded to those suffering illness as a result of the cadaveric human growth hormone programme. [1811]

Ms Jowell: We are still awaiting documentation from the legal representatives of those entitled to compensation to enable us to agree appropriate amounts.

Air Pollution

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the letter from Dr. Geoffrey Myddleton in the *Lancet* of 21/28 December 1996, vol. 348, No. 9043, page 1744. [1806]

Ms Jowell: Dr. Myddleton's letter contains outdated information on concentrations of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon compounds in London air. Current concentrations are less than 1 ng/m^3 (annual average) compared with 26–39 ng/m^3 (annual average concentration) in 1962. The risk to health posed by carcinogens in urban air is very much smaller than that posed by cigarette smoking.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the carcinogenic effect of benzo(a)pyrene; and what are the major sources. [1804]

Ms Jowell: The carcinogenic effects of benzo(a)pyrene were examined by the Department of Health Committee on the Carcinogenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COC) in 1994. The Committee's conclusions were published in the COC Annual Report, copies of which have been placed in the Library. An updated assessment will be published in the 1996 Annual Report. The major sources of benzo(a)pyrene and other polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon compounds in the air are the various forms of combustion of fossil fuels including, in urban areas, motor vehicles.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the atmospheric presence of 3,4-benzpyrene in London and its implications for health. [1805]

Ms Jowell: The concentration of 3,4-benzpyrene is measured for the Department of the Environment at a site in Marsham Street, SW1. Data are currently being considered by the Department of the Environment/ Department of Health Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards with a view to recommending an air quality standard. A report is expected in 1998.

Health Authorities (Funding)

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will amend the formula for funding district health authorities to include status as an off-shore community as a factor. [1771]

Mr. Milburn: We will continue with the research which has already been commissioned to investigate the possible extra costs associated with the provision of accident and emergency and ambulance services in rural areas; this includes looking at the effects of island status. A report is expected in the autumn and the results will be carefully considered.

North-East Essex Mental Health Services Trust

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will hold a full inquiry into the stewardship of the North-East Essex Mental Health Services NHS Trust, with particular reference to *(a)* the dispersal of patients from Severalls Hospital, Colchester and *(b)* the future of the (i) complex and (ii) site. [1553]

Mr. Boateng: North-East Essex Mental Health Services National Health Service Trust is responsible to those who commission services, principally North Essex Health Authority, for the patient care it provides. The NHS Executive and the Trust are in the process of determining the future of the site.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1672]

Mr. Boateng: Our manifesto commits us to establishing

"comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or at work, developed in partnership with all interested parties".

The Government will be consulting widely and developing our proposals in partnership with disability organisations, trade union and others. An essential issue will be the definition of disability. It is not appropriate for us to pre-empt the outcome of that consultation.

St. Mary's Hospital, Newport

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had regarding the need for structural repairs at St. Mary's Hospital, Newport, Isle of Wight. [1772]

Mr. Milburn: Three letters have been received from members of the public regarding the need for structural repairs at St. Mary's Hospital, Newport, Isle of Wight.

NHS Trusts (Management)

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reform the structures relating to the management of NHS trusts in order to increase their accountability. [1551]

Mr. Milburn: The Government is working with the National Health Service to develop an action plan to end the internal market. As part of this we will consider whether any changes to the management of NHS trusts are required.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what written guidance has been issued by his Department on the proper completion of a cervical smear report record; whether the report card requires the reporting of the visual appearance of the cervix; and if it is his policy that reporting of the visual appearance of the cervix should take place. [1656]

Ms Jowell: The cervical cytology request form does not require smear takers to describe the visual appearance of the cervix in all cases. It is recommended that visibility of the cervix and a description be recorded in the woman's medical notes. The condition of the cervix should, however, be included on a request form where there is a suspected abnormality.

The importance of visual inspection of the cervix is emphasised in the British Society for Clinical Cytology's training video and booklet for smear-takers "Taking Cervical Smears" which was promulgated to the National Health Service under cover of EL(94)33. Copies of both these documents are available in the Library.

Secondary Care Services

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will increase the resources available for locally provided secondary care services to North and East Devon health authority for the 1997–98 financial year. [1313]

Mr. Milburn: We shall honour the Health Authority revenue allocations for 1997–98 agreed by the previous Government. Health Authorities are given general allocations for hospital and community health services to commission health care services for their resident population, whether locally or elsewhere. We will look at how resources are distributed across both secondary and primary care, to ensure that these fully reflect local population needs and operate as fairly as possible.

Rural Community Hospitals

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy toward local community hospitals in rural areas; and what advice or directions he is currently giving to local health authorities in that respect. [1281]

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will instruct North and East Devon health authority not to cease to commission health services at Lynton Hospital, North Devon, during the current financial year. [1314]

Mr. Boateng: We will be giving early consideration to issues relating to the configuration of hospital services, including the role of community hospitals. At the moment, it is for health authorities and trusts, in consultation with local general practitioners, to ensure that NHS services are responsive to public needs and wishes.

Longcare Homes

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the implications of the conviction of owners and staff of Longcare Homes for abuse and ill treatment of residents for the future regulation of such homes; and if he will make a statement. [1728]

Mr. Boateng: We are committed to securing quality services by creating a more comprehensive, more independent regulatory framework for homes and other social services which has the interests of users at heart. We will bring forward our proposals for achieving this in due course.

Genetic Screening

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which health authorities fund carrier screening for cystic fibrosis; [1757]

(2) which health authorities fund neo-natal screening for cystic fibrosis; [1759]

(3) how much each health authority spent on genetic services as a percentage of their annual budget in the last year for which figures are available; [1758]

(4) how many health authorities fund pre-natal genetic screening and for which conditions; and if he will name them. [1756]

Ms Jowell: Information on screening for cystic fibrosis, genetic screening, and genetic services is not collected centrally by the Department of Health. The information is held by individual health authorities and trusts to whom a direct approach would have to be made.

Health Trusts (Funding)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health trusts have reported deficit problems relating to the funding arrangements in *(a)* the current and *(b)* the previous year. [1518]

Mr. Milburn: The number of National Health Service trusts forecasting deficits at Quarter 4 1996–97 will be placed in the Library shortly. These deficits may be caused by factors other than funding arrangements. Plans for 1997–98 are still being agreed.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what additional measures he plans to help sufferers of chronic fatigue syndrome. [1820]

Ms Jowell: Our main aims are:

(a) to continue to fund and sponsor research so that chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)\mylagic encephalomyelitis (ME) and its causes are better understood;

(b) to help doctors to deal with patients suffering from the condition in a skilful and sympathetic way.

We will continue to support the voluntary sector to represent and help sufferers from the condition.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he proposes to increase research into ME. [1821]

Ms Jowell: Funding research into myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME) (otherwise known as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS)) is considered alongside other priorities. The National Health Service Research and Development programme is funding a research project called "Should GPs manage chronic fatigue syndrome? A controlled trial".

The main agency through which the Government supports biomedical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council. It is not currently funding any research into CFS\ME, but it always welcomes high-quality applications and these are judged in open competition with other demands for funding, and awarded according to their scientific quality.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the increase in carbon dioxide emissions which will be caused by reducing VAT on domestic fuel. [653]

Angela Eagle: We have estimated that the reduction in VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent. will result in an increase in carbon dioxide emissions of about 0.9 million tonnes per year (equivalent to about a quarter of a million tonnes of carbon) by 2010. This represents about 0.15 per cent. of current carbon dioxide emissions. We shall be developing measures to reduce carbon dioxide

measures in fields such as energy efficiency, renewable energy, combined heat and power, and our integrated transport strategy so as to deliver our proposed target of a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions below 1990 levels by 2010.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what applications his Department is considering for the building of new clean coal plants in the United Kingdom. [1012]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

No applications have been received under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989.

Porpoises

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to create special areas of conservation under the EU Habitats and Species directive for harbour porpoises; and if he will make a statement. [1073]

Angela Eagle: None. The available scientific evidence is insufficient to identify sites which meet the requirements set out in Article 4(1) of the Directive relating to aquatic species which range over wide areas.

Council Tax

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many properties in *(a)* Westminster and *(b)* Pendle are in council tax bands (i) A and (ii) H; and what percentage of the total number of properties in each council area this represents. [1100]

Nick Raynsford: The information requested is as follows:

Dwellings on the Valuation List as at 16 October 1996

	Band A	*Percentage of total*	*Band H*	*Percentage of total*
Westminster	1,300	1.2	12,233	11.4
Pendle	24,336	65.4	53	0.1

Merry Hill Inquiry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he received the inspector's report on the Merry Hill inquiry. [1474]

Mr. Raynsford: The inspector's report on the Merry Hill inquiry was received by the Government Office for the West Midlands on 7 March 1997.

Energy Policy

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans the Government have *(a)* to change the current policy on energy saving and *(b)* to reduce emissions; [1349]

(2) what plans the Government have to encourage more *(a)* businesses and *(b)* homeowners to use energy saving technology. [1348]

Angela Eagle: The Government supports a range of initiatives, schemes and programmes to promote the use of energy saving and energy saving technology by homeowners, businesses, and other energy users, including the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES), the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme, and a number of programmes run by the Energy Saving Trust.

These and other initiatives will be reviewed in the context of the Government's commitment to lead the fight against global warming at the Kyoto conference in December, through a target of 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2010. We will be reviewing our energy efficiency programmes, looking for improvements in all areas, including homeowners' and businesses' use of energy saving technology.

House Renovation Grants (Devon)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will increase the resources available to district councils in Devon for the provision of house renovation grants during the 1997–98 financial year. [1311]

Mr. Raynsford: Resources available to district councils in 1997–98 for house renovation grants were allocated in full as part of the Housing Investment Programme. However, the Government's Capital Receipts initiative will support priority schemes of local authorities which meet key objectives. It will be for local authorities to decide how to use any resources within the general objectives set. A consultation paper on proposals for taking forward the initiative will be issued shortly.

Wind Farms

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review policy guidance concerning wind farms. [1475]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning policy guidance on wind energy developments is contained in Planning Policy Guidance note 22, "Renewable Energy". The Government have no immediate plans to revise that guidance.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has in respect of planning guidance for wind farms in areas of outstanding natural beauty. [1310]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning policy guidance on wind energy developments, including developments in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, is contained in Planning Policy Guidance note 22, "Renewable Energy". Further advice on Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty is given in the recently issued revised Planning Policy Guidance note 7, "The Countryside—Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development". The Government have no immediate plans to revise either guidance note.

Water Abstraction (Rivers)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his policy on the abstraction of water from rivers; and what steps he is taking to protect vulnerable rivers from damage from lower flows of water as a consequence of abstraction. [1282]

Angela Eagle: Abstraction of water from rivers is subject to licensing requirements, set out in Chapter II of the Water Resources Act 1991 and administered by the Environment Agency. The Government announced on 19 May 1997 its intention to review the water abstraction licensing system, with a key aim of ensuring that the needs of the environment are given due weight.

The Environment Agency currently has targets to alleviate low flows in 36 kilometres of rivers in 1997–98 and in a further 32 kilometres in 1998–99.

Waste Disposal (Hurd Deep)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will meet representatives of the States of Jersey to discuss the report they commissioned from Professor Sir John Knill and Dr. Mike Romerill concerning the disposal of radioactive waste in the Hurd Deep. [1436]

Angela Eagle: It is for the States of Jersey to decide whether they wish to approach the United Kingdom Government on this matter. Officials of United Kingdom Departments meet representatives of the States of Jersey for briefing on a regular basis.

Partners in Technology Programme

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the levels of costs to *(a)* firms and *(b)* universities of making funding proposals under the Partners in Technology Programme in 1996; and what steps he intends to take to reduce costs to applicants for the 1997 programme. [1430]

Mr. Raynsford: From a small survey of applicants to the Partners in Technology scheme it has been estimated that the average cost to firms and universities of preparing a proposal in the 1996 round was about £5,000. I am conscious of the need to minimise such costs and my Department has been consulting on the appropriate guidance to issue to applicants.

Planning Schemes

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning schemes in respect of which he has used his call-in powers were awaiting a decision on 5 May; and what plans he has to review the call-in procedure. [1473]

Mr. Raynsford: On 5 May, 42 called-in planning applications in England were awaiting decision. The Government will keep the call-in procedure under review as part of the ongoing process of monitoring the planning system.

Living Earth Foundation (Report)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish the report commissioned from the Living Earth Foundation into the effectiveness of the BRE best practice programme. [1432]

Angela Eagle: The Department commissioned PREST, (Policy Research Engineering, Science and Technology Institute at the University of Manchester), to carry out an independent review of the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme. The review, which was completed in 1996, concluded that the programme is an effective means of generating energy savings; comprehensively covers UK industry and buildings stock; and is well managed. The report on the review is scheduled for publication in the next few weeks and a copy will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Housing Finance

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made for each metropolitan borough of the money available from *(a)* housing capital receipts and *(b)* other capital receipts to finance a housing programme. [1506]

Mr. Raynsford: Local authorities have usable capital receipts which are available for any capital purpose (including housing). The accumulated and unspent usable capital receipts held by each metropolitan borough as at 31 March 1996 are set out in the table below. The table also shows the total of housing receipts set aside by these authorities between 1990–91 and 1995–96. However, individual authorities may have used these set aside receipts to repay debt or in lieu of further borrowing, however, and so may no longer retain them in the form of cash and investments.

We will be consulting the Local Government Association and local authorities on the Government's Capital Receipts initiative in due course. No decision about the basis on which resources are to be distributed to individual authorities will be made until that consultation process is complete.

	Accumulated usable receipts received but not spent at 31 March 1996 £000s	*Set aside receipts from sales of Housing Revenue Account assets 1990–91 to 1995–96* £000s
Barnsley	0	17,536
Birmingham	0	101,704
Bolton	45	13,251
Bradford	0	23,953
Bury	41	7,950
Calderdale	0	6,139
Coventry	0	12,605
Doncaster	0	20,330
Dudley	0	27,154
Gateshead	39	22,738
Kirklees	0	26,962
Knowsley	7,359	16,723
Leeds	0	66,003
Liverpool	4,104	17,879
Manchester	5,066	63,005
Newcastle upon Tyne	0	22,727
North Tyneside	1,932	19,562
Oldham	0	12,460
Rochdale	2,347	14,488
Rotherham	1,046	20,743
Salford	223	20,124
Sandwell	0	39,222
Sefton	6,043	12,532
Sheffield	0	46,500
Solihull	0	11,364
South Tyneside	0	20,378
St. Helens	13	10,699
Stockport	0	10,728
Sunderland	1,656	43,073

	Accumulated usable receipts received but not spent at 31 March 1996 £000s	*Set aside receipts from sales of Housing Revenue Account assets 1990–91 to 1995–96* £000s
Tameside	0	12,049
Trafford	3,587	10,256
Wakefield	118	26,659
Walsall	0	32,298
Wigan	55	22,082
Wirral	86	14,089
Wolverhampton	159	32,058

Sources:
1995–96 Capital Outturn Returns.
HRA subsidy claim forms.

Council House Sales

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the value of the set-aside receipts from the sale of council houses *(a)* in total and *(b)* since 1990 for (i) England, (ii) Manchester and (iii) Trafford. [1633]

Mr. Raynsford: Between 1990–91 and 1995–96, the value of housing receipts set aside from the sale of local authority housing and associated land in England was £5,283 million. The corresponding figure for Manchester was £63.0 million and for Trafford £10.3 million. However, individual authorities may have used these receipts to repay debt or in lieu of further borrowing and so may no longer retain them in the form of cash and investments. No information is available on the value of receipts set aside before 1990–91.

Former British Local Properties

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to assist Leicester Housing Association to improve the ex-British Coal properties under its ownership in North Nottinghamshire; [1818]

(2) if he plans to remove the embargo on the application of social housing grants to the improvement of former British Coal properties. [1817]

Mr. Raynsford: We have no immediate plans to remove the bar on the application of social housing grant to the improvement of former British Coal properties, although we intend to look again at this issue. Any reconsideration of the policy will, however, need to take into account the wider issues of using grant to pay for repairs or improvements to stock transferred to housing associations from ex public sector landlords, and will need to ensure that any such expenditure represents good value for money.

Earth Summit (New York)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he plans to put before the Earth summit II in New York in June; and if he will make a statement. [1749]

Angela Eagle: We are working with our partners in the European Union to ensure that the meeting results in a renewal of the Rio objectives, and in particular for advances on climate change, forests, fresh water, oceans and energy.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1689]

Angela Eagle: The provision of information in alternative formats is decided on an individual project or campaign basis, taking into account communication objectives, intended audience, and the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

The availability of information for the blind and partially sighted is publicised in a variety of ways including:

- public advice centres, such as local authorities, libraries, and Citizens' Advice Bureaux;
- specialist events, conferences and exhibitions, such as NAIDEX;
- joint publicity initiatives with the RNIB;
- audio tape distribution, including the Central Office of Information (COI) *Sound Advice* network;
- individual requests and orders to the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport;
- the Internet.

Plutonium Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research proposals he has developed in order to develop a technically feasible and economically viable strategy for plutonium disposal. [1790]

Mr. Meacher: No specific research proposals on this issue have been developed, but a current study of the requirements for a research strategy for the disposal of high-level radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel will be considering the possible implications of co-disposal of surplus plutonium.

Transmitter Masts

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to give local planning authorities greater powers to restrict the inappropriate siting of transmitter masts for mobile phone networks. [1527]

Mr. Raynsford: The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 grants a general planning permission for certain telecommunications masts providing:

- the mast is erected by a telecommunications code system operator licensed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under the Telecommunications Act 1984;
- the mast does not exceed 15 metres in height;
- the mast is not erected in a protected area such as National Park, area of outstanding natural beauty or conservation area; and
- the mast is not refused prior approval by the local planning authority within the 28 day period specified in the Order. The authority must be given the opportunity to say whether they wish to approve, within 28 days, details of the mast's siting and appearance, and are able to refuse approval if they consider there to be a serious threat to amenity.

Full planning permission is normally required for any mast which does not meet these criteria. In all cases the local authority had the opportunity to influence the siting of the mast.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he proposes to take to replace compulsory competitive tendering with a duty on local authorities to achieve best value. [1775]

Ms Armstrong: Well run local authorities which deliver high standard services are vital to the quality of people's lives. We are therefore very keen to press ahead with our Manifesto commitment to replace Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) with a duty on local authorities to achieve best value and we will make this change as soon as Parliamentary time allows. We are using the interim period to talk to local government, the business community and others to ensure that the new framework is efficient and imaginative, but realistic, and makes the most of what local authorities, the private sector and the local community can contribute.

Achieving best value will not just be about economy and efficiency, but also about effectiveness and the quality of local services. The new framework will be a demanding challenge to local authorities, seeking continuous improvements in service costs and quality. It will be a permissive framework which emphasises local choices and local accountability. But it will also ensure that every local authority makes improvements. I am today writing to the Local Government Association to consult them on a draft statement of principles about best value which encapsulate these points. A copy of this letter will be placed in the Library.

We intend to encourage authorities to develop the principles of best value and pursue innovative approaches to service delivery in advance of primary legislation on best value. We have therefore agreed with the Local Government Association that Government will seek, where possible and within the existing statutory framework, to relax CCT for a selected number of authorities on condition that they follow a best value regime. We will set out shortly criteria against which authorities' bids will be considered—including a requirement to publish the authority's plans for improving the quality of services, enhancing efficiency and reducing costs to the taxpayers. The criteria will also reflect our view that competition will be an important management tool and test of best value, but that it will not be the only such tool.

Because the bulk of local authorities will continue to be subject to the existing CCT regime, we will also carry out an urgent review of existing regulations and guidance to make it work better and, to the extent that it is consistent with existing CCT legislation, introduce elements of best value. The Review, which will take 4–6 weeks, will be carried out in consultation with the LGA and other interested parties. Among other matters we will specifically be considering the question of timetables, including those for authorities who are subject to recent reorganisation. The Government will then consult on proposals with a view to laying new regulations and guidance in the summer. In the meantime, local authorities must continue to plan for meeting existing statutory obligations.

We have an open mind on whether services are delivered by the private sector or directly within the public sector. Either way there needs to be an effective partnership, and fair and open competition where this is called for. To achieve this, we accept that direct service organisations should be able to compete for work where it makes sense to do so. So we are reviewing the framework within which local authorities carry out work for others. We are also to review the restriction on factors which local authorities can take into account in awarding contracts consistent with our obligations under European Community rules.

These proposals should leave no doubt that Government intends to pursue a rigorous alternative approach to the improvement of local services, confident of its success in partnership with local government and the private sector.

Secondary Liquid Fuels

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to make a further response to the Second report of the Environment Committee on the burning of secondary liquid fuels in cement kilns (HC 497, Session 1994–95). [1514]

Angela Eagle: The previous Government responded, in June 1996, to the Environment Committee's report on the burning of secondary liquid fuels in cement kilns. We plan no further response. The Government will respond shortly, however, to the Committee's report on the environmental impacts of cement manufacture, published in March this year.

Capital Receipts (London)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the total available capital receipts for each London borough; and when they will be available for capital housing spending. [1754]

Mr. Raynsford: Information about the usable capital receipts available in each London borough was given in my answer to my hon. Friend on 20 May 1997 [*Official Report, column number 48*]. The table below provides further information the total of housing receipts set aside by these authorities between 1990–91 and 1995–96. Individual authorities may have used these receipts to repay debt or in lieu of further borrowing, however, and so may no longer retain them in the form of cash and investments.

	Set aside receipts from sales of Housing Revenue Account assets 1990–91 to 1995–96 £.000s
Barking and Dagenham	25,418
Barnet	28,642
Bexley	19,194
Brent	36,667
Bromley	100,277
Camden	58,227

	Set aside receipts from sales of Housing Revenue Account assets 1990–91 to 1995–96 £,000s
City of London	760
Croydon	33,413
Ealing	39,996
Enfield	26,326
Greenwich	36,368
Hackney	41,651
Hammersmith and Fulham	27,481
Haringey	38,592
Harrow	15,548
Havering	24,526
Hillingdon	44,030
Hounslow	43,549
Islington	59,805
Kensington and Chelsea	15,073
Kingston upon Thames	10,873
Lambeth	56,008
Lewisham	51,037
Merton	21,312
Newham	30,618
Redbridge	23,931
Richmond upon Thames	18,063
Southwark	54,385
Sutton	14,350
Tower Hamlets	42,643
Waltham Forest	18,449
Wandsworth	83,697
Westminster	44,562

Source:
Housing Revenue Account subsidy claim forms.

Revenue Support Grant

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will amend the formula for calculating the revenue support grant to include status as an off-shore community as a factor. [1770]

Mr. Raynsford: We are committed to a fair distribution of Government grant. We will discuss with the Local Government Association any possible changes in the formulae which local government wishes us to consider. I would not want to anticipate the arguments which might be put forward for and against any particular change.

Global Warming

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department forecasts global average temperatures to be more than 0.5 degree centigrade above the 1951 to 1980 global average; and if he will make a statement. [1750]

Angela Eagle: Research by the Hadley Centre, supported by my Department, shows that the net effect of warming due to man-made greenhouse gases, coupled with cooling due to man-made sulphate particles, is expected to lead to global average temperatures of more than 0.5 degree centigrade above the 1951–80 average during the first decade of the next century.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1690]

Angela Eagle: Our Manifesto commits us to establishing "comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or at work, developed in partnership with all interested parties". In developing and amending legislation and guidance, my Department will seek to ensure that this commitment is implemented.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what arrangements he has made with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in respect of their joint responsibilities under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 and the Environment Act 1995. [1791]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friends will consult each other in the exercise of their shared responsibilities under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 as amended by the Environment Act 1995.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his policy to include representatives from NGOs with an expertise in nuclear waste on the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee. [1781]

Mr. Meacher: Decisions on the membership of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee will be taken in the light of the recent financial management and policy review, the recommendations of which are being considered.

Strategic Authority for London

Mr. Casale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his policy that European Union nationals, who are resident in London, will be able to take part in the proposed referendum to restore a strategic authority to London. [1807]

Mr. Raynsford: This is an issue which will be covered in the forthcoming Consultation Document. If the franchise for the referendum follows the local government franchise, European Union nationals resident within the designated area would be entitled to vote.

Area Cost Adjustment

Ms Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the area cost adjustment mechanism. [1536]

Mr. Raynsford: I will want to look again at the area cost adjustment. The Department has commissioned further work on some of the concerns raised in response to the Review of the Area Cost Adjustment during 1996. I will also want to listen carefully to the views of local government about the adjustment before coming to conclusions about the way forward.

Asbestos

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will press

for *(a)* a Europe-wide ban on the import of asbestos and asbestos products, *(b)* the introduction of a system for registering asbestos products in public buildings and *(c)* further regulation of the asbestos removal licensing system. [1699]

Angela Eagle: I appreciate the concerns of the hon. Member on this matter. The Government is determined to deal effectively with all aspects of the asbestos problem. The Health and Safety Commission has already put in hand urgent work to support the EU activity to ban the supply of all asbestos, with exceptions for essential users; to consider the feasibility of registering asbestos in public buildings; and to review the asbestos removal licensing system. I will be discussing these issues with the Health and Safety Commission shortly.

Homelessness

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce a rent deposit scheme for homeless people beginning private tenancies. [1752]

Mr. Raynsford: We will consider very carefully the potential for introducing rent deposit and guarantee schemes as we develop our policies on homelessness and on the private rented sector.

Water and Sewerage

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what proposals he has for modernising the law relating to water and sewerage, with special reference to adoption arrangements for private sewers; [1101]

(2) what assessment he has made of the consultation paper on water and sewerage law, 1986; and what steps he intends taking to ensure that developers construct sewers to sufficient standards to pass building regulations. [1102]

Angela Eagle: The Review of Water and Sewerage Law carried out in 1986 considered responsibilities for water supply pipes and lateral drains which link properties to the public sewer. We have no plans at present for water companies to take over ownership of that part of the water pipe or lateral drain which is the responsibility of the householder. But we have recently announced that we expect all water companies to provide a free leakage detection and repair service for supply pipes. All private sewers and drains must be constructed to the standard laid down in the Building Regulations. If they are to be adopted as public sewers by the sewerage undertaker they must be built to the set requirements used by all undertakers which are of a higher standard. We have no plans at present to make any changes to the current legislation with regard to the adoption of private sewers.

TRANSPORT

South West Trains

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the total amount payable in fines by South West Trains following the cancelled and delayed services in *(a)* February and *(b)* March, indicating the date by which these fines must be paid. [30]

Ms Glenda Jackson: South West Trains have been penalised under the incentive regime in the franchise agreement. South West Trains paid the Franchising Director just over £900,000 for poor performance in January to March.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the total amount of subsidy which South West Trains will receive over the length of its franchise. [1141]

Ms Jackson: In 1995–96 and 1996–97 South West Trains received £72.682 million in cash inclusive of payments under the performance incentive regime. From 1997–98 to the end of the franchise in 2002–2003 South West Trains is estimated to receive £310.139 million in current prices, excluding performance incentive regime payments.

Liverpool Airport

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for the expansion of Liverpool airport. [816]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Environment and Transport Ministers are currently considering the report by the Inspector at the Public Inquiry into Liverpool Airport plc's applications for phased development of the airport. A decision on the application will be made in due course.

Wyre Piddle Bypass

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what criteria he will assess future bids for funding for the Wyre Piddle bypass; and if he will make a statement. [1037]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Guidance will shortly be issued to local authorities on their bids for support for capital expenditure on transport infrastructure in 1998–99.

Car Use

Mr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consideration he has given to the applicability to the United Kingdom of Californian State Ordinance XV requiring large employers to make and publish travel-to-work plans for their employees which minimise car use; and if he will make a statement. [843]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government is keen to encourage employers from both the public and private sector to find ways of reducing the impact on the environment of their employees' travel patterns, particularly their commuting journeys. One of the ways in which employers can do this is to introduce company travel plans for their employees. A growing number of organisations in the UK have already successfully implemented programmes of this nature, for example, Boots, BAA and Nottinghamshire County Council. A travel plan will soon be introduced at Stockley Park. Many local authorities are working with businesses to develop similar measures as part of their TravelWise programmes. The Government will attach a high priority

to promoting the introduction of more company travel plans. To this end, we have been working with Transport 2000 on their document, "Changing Journeys to Work: an employers' guide to green commuting plans" which we are helping to launch on 4 June 1997.

Road Tax

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* cars, *(c)* commercial vehicles and *(c)* motor bikes which are on the road without a road tax licence for the most recent year for which figures are available. [1019]

Ms Glenda Jackson: A roadside survey involving over one million vehicles conducted in 1994 estimated that the numbers evading vehicle excise duty (VED) are as follows:

	Unlicensed stock in use (thousand)	*Unlicensed stock as a percentage of stock in use*
Private and Light Goods	864	3.7
Goods	14	3.1
Motorcycle	371	35.0

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for new measures to reduce the loss in revenue from motorists not paying their road tax. [1830]

Ms Jackson: New initiatives include measures to improve the quality of the vehicle register and make it more difficult to drop out of the licensing system through the introduction of Dual Notification and Statutory Off-Road Notification schemes; the introduction of a national scheme to wheelclamp and impound unlicensed vehicles later this year; and the trialling of camera technology to automate the detection process.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what schemes exist to deal with motorists who fail to pay their road tax. [1828]

Ms Jackson: Police and traffic wardens detect unlicensed vehicles as part of their normal duties and report them to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) for follow-up action, including prosecution.

The Agency and the police also conduct "blitz campaigns" throughout the country. These take the form of extensive localised publicity to encourage motorists to relicense their vehicles, or risk being caught in subsequent police checks.

Police and traffic wardens place conspicuous red notices on the windscreens of parked unlicensed vehicles. These advise motorists that an offence has been detected and that they should take out a licence immediately.

Further new initiatives are being developed to supplement the current enforcement effort and reduce the level of VED evasion.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of motorists who failed to pay their road tax in the last year; and what was the estimated loss of revenue. [1829]

Ms Jackson: The number of unlicensed vehicles in use on the public road in Great Britain at the end of December 1996 was estimated at 1.5 million. The estimated loss through evasion in 1996–97 was £175 million which represents 4.1 per cent., of the revenue due.

Great North Eastern Railways

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the length of franchise currently operated by Great North Eastern Railways; and what plans he has to allow for the franchise to be lengthened. [1142]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The franchise term runs for seven years from April 1996. We have no plans to allow for the term to be lengthened.

Crossrail

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of Crossrail. [1129]

Ms Glenda Jackson: On 2 April 1996, the then Secretary of State for Transport announced that he had asked the Chairman of Railtrack to consider the project further. We will consider the future of Crossrail in the light of both Railtrack's views when received, and our own priorities for transport in London.

Minor Works Schemes

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to initiate a review of the funding for the transport minor works schemes. [1137]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The government will be giving consideration over the coming months to the funding of local transport infrastructure including support for minor schemes.

Public Service Obligation Grant

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the public service obligation grant for each of the last 10 years. [1140]

Mrs. Glenda Jackson: The information requested, for the seven years from 1987–88 to 1993–94 is as follows:

Year	*Public Service Obligation Grant Payments (£ million)*
1987–88	794
1988–89	473
1989–90	501
1990–91	602
1991–92	892
1992–93	1,155
1993–94	930

Since 1 April 1994, support for passenger rail services has been provided by the Franchising Director. The amount of grant paid, for the three years 1994–95 to 1996–97, is as follows:

Year	*Public Service Obligation Grant Payments (£ million)*
1994–95	1,783
1995–96	1,669
1996–97	1,813

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody. To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list the contractual obligations on London and Continental Railways to introduce daytime and night sleeper services from north of London to the continent via the channel tunnel; [1149]

(2) what powers he has to ensure that London and Continental introduce overnight sleeper services from north of London to the continent via the channel tunnel. [1147]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The provision of regional day and night services through the Channel Tunnel is a commercial matter for London and Continental Railways, who are contractually obliged to promote a Transport and Works Act Order for a link between the West Coast Main Line and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. This link would be used by regional services. LCR accordingly lodged an application in January and I hope that Parliament will soon have the opportunity to debate it.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects daytime through services from north of London through the channel tunnel to be introduced; and what steps he has taken or expects to take to encourage the introduction of these services. [1146]

Ms Jackson: London and Continental Railways, along with their European railway partners are responsible for international passenger services through the Channel Tunnel. I understand that they plan to start regional services to and from Paris this year.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list the contributions made by Her Majesty's Government for the purchase of the British Eurostar trains which were given to London and Continental Railways; and if he will list the annual repayments to Her Majesty's Government and when the payments will terminate; [1150]

(2) if he will list the contributions made by Her Majesty's Government and British Rail in the building, preparation and introduction of Eurostar sleeper services; and which of these funds are recoverable. [1148]

Ms Jackson: These trains are all owned or leased by Eurostar (UK) Ltd. (EUKL). EUKL, (previously European Passenger Services Ltd.) was transferred to London and Continental Railways (LCR) on 31 May 1996 as an integral part of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link project. An explanatory memorandum on the contracts and agreements between the Government and LCR is in the Library. While European Passenger Services was in Government ownership (9 May 1994 to 31 May 1996), direct grants totalling £423.7 million were made towards running costs and investment. No specific sums were, however, earmarked for the purchase of Eurostar trainsets, or for the introduction of European sleeper services. These grants are not recoverable but there are provisions in the Transfer Agreements for the EUKL assets and liabilities to revert to Government in the event that LCR should fail.

Rail Privatisation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the total amount spent on lawyers, accountants, consultants and other professionals for the purposes of privatising the railways. [1127]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Expenditure by the Department of Transport, the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising, and the Office of the Rail Regulator since 1992–93 is as follows:

£ million

	1992–93	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Lawyers	1.4	4.7	10.7	17.5	10.6
Accountants	1.7	2.0	5.0	8.8	8.7
Other Consultants and Professionals	2.4	5.8	11.7	25.4	21.1

Expenditure by British Rail and Railtrack is a matter for the organisations themselves, but we understand that their total privatisation costs to the end of 1996–97 were as follows:

£ million

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
British Rail	—	92	85	101	54
Railtrack	—	—	46	32	[1]—

[1] Railtrack was privatised in May 1996.

Any breakdown of the figures for BR and Railtrack would be for the organisations themselves to provide.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which aspects of the rail franchising and privatisation process he plans to refer to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. [1135]

Ms Glenda Jackson: As part of our current review of railway regulation, we will form a view on whether any of the privatised rail businesses should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. On 22 May 1997, the President of the Board of Trade announced that, under the Fair Trading Act 1973, she had decided to refer to the MMC the acquisition by National Express Group plc of the ScotRail and Central Trains rail franchises.

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the regulatory framework for the privatised railways. [1503]

Ms Jackson: Regulation of the rail industry, and the sanctions available to the regulators, need to be strengthened. We have started thorough review of rail regulation to identify exactly what improvements need to be made.

Rail Regulation

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he plans to take to strengthen the regulatory framework for the railways. [1151]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have made it clear that the regulation of the rail industry, and the sanctions available to the regulators, need to be strengthened. We have started a thorough review of rail regulation to identify exactly what improvements need to be made.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend the general authority given to the Rail regulator. [1134]

Ms Jackson: At present I have no plans to amend the general authority. We are currently conducting a thorough review of rail regulation to identify exactly what improvements need to be made.

British Flagged Vessels

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number and tonnage of British flagged vessels in *(a)* 1978 and *(b)* 1996. [1130]

Ms Jackson: The number and tonnage of British flagged vessels (trading vessels of 500gt and over registered in the United Kingdom and the Crown Dependencies) in 1978 and 1996 is as follows:

	Number of vessels	*Gross tonnage (in thousands)*	*Deadweight tonnage (in thousands)*
1978	1,421	28,078	46,327
1996	377	6,057	7,835

Transport Pricing

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on Commissioner Kinnock's White Paper on fair transport pricing. [1126]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government welcome the broad principles outlined in the European Commission Green Paper, which seeks to encourage more environmentally friendly, fairer and more efficient use of transport. The Government also support the need for further study and debate on the issues raised, including those of subsidiarity.

Driving Instruction

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations his Department has received in the last 12 months on motorway driving instruction and examination for *(a)* car drivers and *(b)* other divers; what plans he has to make training and instruction on motorway driving compulsory for all drivers; and if he will make a statement. [1081]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department has received eight representations in respect of car drivers, including one from my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley. There have been none in respect of drivers of other categories of vehicle, though in any case drivers who hold a full car licence and are learning to drive larger vehicles may practice in them on motorways. We have no plans to make motorway training compulsory for any class of learner driver.

West Coast Main Line

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the amounts of public funds which will be spent on the modernisation of the west coast main line. [1136]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Railtrack is committed to spend £1.5 billion on the modernisation and upgrade of the West Coast Main Line funded by access charges paid by the train operators using the route. The upgrade to provide tilting trains and faster line speeds is being paid for by Virgin, the InterCity West Coast franchisee. Virgin is receiving £76.8 million subsidy in its first full financial year, reversing to a premium payment of £220.3 million to OPRAF in 2011/2012.

We have made it clear that we expect higher levels of investment in the network and are considering whether the regulatory regime in place is sufficient to ensure the delivery of that level of investment.

Franchising Director

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to issue new objectives, instructions and guidance to the Franchising Director. [1152]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are currently conducting a thorough review of rail regulation, in line with the Government's commitment to introduce tougher regulation of the privatised rail industry. A key element in this review will be to determine how the objectives, instructions and guidance we issue to the Franchising Director should be revised to reflect the Government's policy priorities.

London Underground

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out his Department's investment plans for the London underground system for the next five years. [1072]

Ms Glenda Jackson: London Transport's planned levels of investment in the Underground, based on the expenditure plans inherited from the previous Government, are set out in the table below. The Government is carrying out a comprehensive spending review. We are also giving urgent consideration to the options for increasing the level of investment in the Underground through Public/Private Partnerships.

Year	Investment [1,2] (£ million)
1997–98	312.6
1998–99	215.3
1999–00	369.5
2000–01	422.9
2001–02	447.3
2002–03	456.6

Notes:
[1] 1997–98 price.
[2] Does not include investment in the Jubilee Line Extension, investment in the core network which is part of the JLE project and privately financed investment.

Speed Limiters

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans his Department has to introduce legislation requiring new vehicles to be fitted with on-board variable speed limiters; and if he will make a statement. [1076]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department's research programme includes looking at the variable technology but we have no plans at present to introduce legislation.

London Buses

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if it is the Government's policy to ensure that buses in the capital are predominantly London red in colour; [1708]

(2) if it is the Government's policy to ensure that when existing tenders to run London bus routes expire, the new tender requires the operator to use a fleet of buses bearing the red London livery. [1709]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is a matter for London Transport Buses. Their current policy is to require operators submitting bids for routes which operate within Central London to use predominantly red livery. The only exception to the above policy is for incumbent operators who are re-bidding for central London routes where the vehicles used are not currently red.

Outside the central area operators may adopt their own livery subject to approval by London Transport Buses.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many passengers per annum use London bus routes *(a)* not bearing and *(b)* bearing the London red livery. [1712]

Ms Jackson: In the financial year 1996–97 London Transport estimate that just over 80 per cent. of the 1,234 million journeys made on London Transport bus services were on vehicles with a predominantly red London livery.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which London bus route tenders *(a)* expired in the last six months and *(b)* are due to expire in the next six months. [1710]

Ms Jackson: London bus service contracts which expired between 1 December 1996 and 31 May 1997 are as follows:

20, 35, 40, 42, 54, 75, 91, 108, 167, 184, 190, 204, 206, 298, 310, 311, 345, 362, 391, 462, 617, 624, 629, 638, 661, 851, 931, E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E7, E8, E9, H40, N91, W13D.

London bus service contracts which are due to expire between 1 June 1997 and 30 November 1997 are as follows:

14, 16, 21, 24, 32, 34, 38, 39, 57, 63, 64, 65, 71, 74, 83, 85, 86, 90, 102, 127, 128, 129, 130, 150, 156, 170, 192, 197, 213, 221, 265, 281, 289, 312, 314, 364, 369, 371, 406, 465, 479, 499, 632, 650, 16A, 64A, 112D, 371D, N14, N21, N24, N38, W2, X30.

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which London bus routes are not serviced by buses bearing the London red livery. [1711]

Ms Jackson: The following London Transport bus routes are operated with vehicles which do not carry the London red livery:

13, 19, 20, 22A, 22B, 24, 55, 57, 65, 66, 67, 78, 85, 90, 92, 96, 97, 97A, 103, 105, 108, 114, 117, 123, 125, 126, 127, 132, 138, 141, 142, 146, 153, 158, 161, 162, 165, 167, 168, 173, 176, 179, 181, 188, 190, 191, 193, 203, 210, 212, 214, 215, 225, 227, 233, 236, 248, 252, 256, 257, 258, 260, 261, 269, 272, 275, 284, 285, 286, 289, 296, 299, 315, 318, 320, 340, 346, 362, 365, 367, 379, 389, 396, 398, 399, 400, 402, 403, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 422, 428, 444, 462, 465, 479, 492, 511, 606, 613, 616, 627, 645, 646, 650, 651, 661, 670, 673, 678, 693, 726, B11, B15, C4, D5, D6, D8, E2, E8, ELS, ELT, ELX, H10, H11, H13, H17, H26, H27, H28, H29, K5, K6, R2, R5, R6, R7, R8, R61, R62, S3, W6, W9, W10, W11, W12, W13, W14, W15, W16, X72, 307 (school journeys only), 371 (school journeys only).

Bus Industry

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will introduce a new regulatory framework for the bus industry. [1138]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government is committed to the proper regulation of bus services at the local level, with partnerships between local councils and bus operators an essential component, as part of the development of a balanced transport system. I am examining how best to implement that commitment.

Roads (Leicester)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will include the Leicester Eastern Bypass in the Private Finance Initiative scheme. [1471]

Ms Glenda Jackson: As the Leicester Eastern Bypass is not included in the current National Trunk Roads Programme it would be for the local planning and highway authorities to decide whether to seek to progress a scheme under the Private Finance Initiative.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to oppose the building of the Leicester A46/A47 Link Road and Eastern District Distributor Road through densely populated areas of the Leicester East constituency. [1492]

Ms Jackson: As with all local highway schemes, the Secretary of State's involvement with the A46/A47

Eastern District Distributor Road is limited to consideration of applications for their possible funding, through Transport Supplementary Grant (TSG), and the determination of any statutory Orders applications which may be made, by the local highway authority, to enable the schemes to proceed. In both cases, applications must be considered on their merits. That said, the Secretary of State's decision in relation to statutory Orders, made in respect of the A46/A47 Link Road, will be issued very soon. To date orders have been submitted for consideration in respect of the Eastern District Distributor Road.

Roads (Leicester)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will assess the advantages of extending the Leicester Eastern Bypass to a new junction south of exit 21 on the M1. [1472]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No, because the Leicester Eastern Bypass scheme is no longer in the National Trunk Road programme.

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress of the Jubilee Line extension; and when he expects the works to be complete. [1819]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Tunnelling for the Jubilee Line extension is now complete and the rest of the associated civil engineering construction work is drawing to a close, while the electrical and mechanical engineering work is well under way. London Transport aims to open the line by the end of September 1998.

A40 (De-trunking)

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the time scale for progress towards de-trunking the A40 through Cheltenham. [1254]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Objectives received following the publication of a draft Order to de-trunk the A40 through Cheltenham and to trunk the A436 from the A40 at Shipton Solers to the A417 at Air Balloon roundabout are currently being considered. The timescale for the de-trunking depends on the possible need for a public inquiry.

Road Works (A40)

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the completion of the A40 road works in Acton and Shepherd's Bush. [1361]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are committed to a strategic review of the Road Programme. The terms of reference are not yet settled so you will appreciate that I cannot say what the effects of the review will be for this scheme.

Bus Services

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the regulation of bus services *(a)* inside and *(b)* outside London. [1504]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government is committed to the proper regulation of bus services at the local level, with partnerships between local councils and bus operators an essential component, as part of the development of a balanced transport system. I am examining how best to implement that commitment, recognising that circumstances in London differ from the rest of the country.

Departmental Spending Limits

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he plans to stay within the Department of Transport's spending limits for the next financial year as set out in the Budget Statement in November. [1507]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Like other Departments, the Department of Transport is reviewing its objectives and priorities within the published expenditure limits set for 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Speed Limits

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will commission research on the relationship between lower speed limits and the reduction of *(a)* road deaths and *(b)* vehicle noise and emission pollution. [1315]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My Department already has a programme of research which investigates these questions. A wide range of recent and current research projects has been commissioned by the Department which include investigations into the relationship between speed, road safety and the environment. The content of the research programme is reviewed each year. I have written to the hon. Member with details of this research. Copies of the letter have been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

SCOTLAND

Local Business Rates

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to discuss with COSLA the collection and distribution of local business rates; and if he will make a statement. [575]

Mr. Chisholm: All these matters are under consideration and we will consult with interested parties, including COSLA.

Civil Service (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to increase the number of employees from ethnic minorities within his Department. [229]

Mr. Dewar: The Scottish Office is an employer committed to equal opportunities for all staff and we monitor the recruitment of men and women whatever their background to ensure that no discrimination takes place.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many civil servants at each grade within his Department were of Asian origin on 5 May. [228]

Mr. Dewar: The headcount of staff of Asian origin employed in the Scottish Office and it's Executive Agencies at 1 May 1997 is shown in the table.

Grade equivalent	*Total*
The Scottish Office and it's Executive Agencies other than the Scottish Prison Service	
Grade 6	1
SEO	1
HEO	2
EO	1
AO	8
AA	5
The Scottish Prison Service	[1]5
Total	23

[1] Due to a pay and grading review, Scottish Prison Service staff are no longer classified by the standard civil service grades and are now split into pay bands. Consequently, no breakdown by grade is possible for SPS.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the proposed changes to the operation of compulsory competitive tendering in local government. [580]

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce a moratorium on compulsory competitive tendering for local government contracts. [1084]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 22 May 1997]:* I am keen to press ahead with our Manifesto commitment to replace Compulsory Competitive Tendering with a new best value regime. After discussion with Scottish local government, I plan to move ahead quickly to develop the elements of this regime. Competitive discipline will form an important part of the new regime, but will no longer be the only method by which value for money in local government is improved.

I therefore intend to lay Regulations as soon as possible to suspend for a further year the planned reintroduction of CCT under both the Local Government Planning, and Land Act 1980 and the Local Government Act 1988. The statutory basis of the system will remain in place to be reactivated after July 1998 as necessary. White collar CCT, including housing management, would then be scheduled to start on or after April 1999. The suspension of CCT will allow time to start developing an alternative system to demonstrate best value in the provision of all council services. Authorities who are able to demonstrate significant progress towards achieving the key elements of the new best value regime will be able to apply for continued exemption, on an individual basis, from aspects of the CCT regime. In the meantime, however, I have made it clear that I expect councils to deal responsibly with tenders they have under way, consistent with their statutory duty to make proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services. Decisions on the award of contracts will be subject to audit in the usual way.

I have agreed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities that a task force of officials from the Scottish Office, COSLA and the Accounts Commission for Scotland will develop the key elements of a best value approach. The first meeting of the task force will take place today.

Because of the immediate pressure on authorities from the existing timetable for the reintroduction of CCT in Scotland I indicated how I intended to proceed at a meeting with COSLA on 27 May. I have placed a copy of the relevant press statement in the Library.

Primary School Class Sizes

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the average, maximum and minimum class sizes in primary 1 to primary 7 in each local education authority area in Scotland. [594]

Mr. Wilson: The information requested is as follows.

Class size average, minimum and maximum for P1–P3 by Education Authority, 1995 Publicly funded primary schools

Single and 2 stage classes (2 stage classes are included with the lower stage)

Education authority	*P1*			*P2*			*P3*		
	Average	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Average*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Average*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Aberdeen City	25.6	16	33	25.6	16	33	26.5	20	33
Aberdeenshire	23.7	8	32	24.7	5	32	24.4	8	33
Angus	22.7	4	32	25.0	9	32	26.0	8	35
Argyll and Bute	21.4	7	32	24.7	14	33	23.5	11	33
Scottish Borders	23.6	16	34	25.5	2	32	23.8	5	32
Clackmannanshire	25.3	14	33	25.7	17	33	26.9	21	32
Dumfries and Galloway	23.7	12	33	25.3	16	33	24.5	15	33
Dundee City	25.5	10	33	25.9	20	33	26.56	10	33
East Ayrshire	23.7	10	33	25.9	17	33	25.9	16	33
East Dunbartonshire	24.6	16	33	27.2	19	33	26.6	18	33
East Lothian	24.1	8	32	25.4	3	32	25.8	18	31
East Renfrewshire	25.8	18	33	28.6	17	33	27.7	16	33
Edinburgh, City of	26.2	14	33	26.7	10	33	27.6	17	33
Falkirk	25.8	16	33	26.0	3	33	27.1	19	33
Fife	24.3	14	32	25.4	16	33	26.2	11	33

Class size average, minimum and maximum for P1–P3 by Education Authority, 1995 Publicly funded primary schools

Single and 2 stage classes (2 stage classes are included with the lower stage)

Education authority	P1			P2			P3		
	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Glasgow, City of	23.9	5	33	24.8	6	34	25.1	5	33
Highland	22.1	1	33	23.2	3	33	22.8	1	32
Inverclyde	25.9	17	33	25.0	16	33	24.4	1	33
Midlothian	24.1	11	33	24.9	6	32	26.0	15	33
Moray	23.7	11	33	24.8	15	32	26.0	16	33
North Ayrshire	24.4	12	33	24.5	16	33	26.3	16	33
North Lanarkshire	23.3	6	33	24.4	6	33	25.0	14	33
Orkney Islands	19.8	8	29	23.4	16	28	19.7	12	27
Perth and Kinross	24.0	9	34	25.1	13	33	25.7	16	33
Renfrewshire	25.3	18	34	26.2	14	34	25.5	13	33
Shetland Islands	18.1	11	29	20.0	8	26	19.6	9	31
South Ayrshire	24.7	12	33	25.6	16	33	26.4	17	33
South Lanarkshire	24.2	10	33	25.7	15	33	25.7	10	33
Stirling	23.3	11	33	24.0	7	33	25.0	11	33
West Dunbartonshire	25.3	16	33	25.2	16	32	25.8	19	34
West Lothian	23.0	5	33	25.8	14	33	25.5	6	33
Western Isles	14.9	2	24	23.3	17	28	18.6	4	31

Class size average, minimum and maximum for P4–P7 Education Authority, 1995 Publicly funded primary schools

Single and 2 stage classes (2 stage classes are included with the lower stage)

Education authority	P4			P5			P6			P7		
	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Aberdeen City	26.9	18	33	26.6	18	33	26.0	15	33	26.6	13	33
Aberdeenshire	25.6	10	33	26.2	15	33	24.9	7	33	26.4	17	33
Angus	26.2	6	33	26.4	6	33	23.6	1	34	28.6	21	33
Argyll and Bute	24.0	8	33	25.1	19	34	22.4	10	33	24.7	9	33
Scottish Borders	23.3	4	33	24.2	4	33	24.5	3	32	23.4	4	32
Clackmannanshire	28.3	18	33	26.0	20	33	25.3	17	33	25.5	18	33
Dumfries and Galloway	25.5	14	33	26.1	13	33	24.7	13	33	27.5	15	33
Dundee City	26.5	14	33	26.4	8	33	26.7	13	34	27.3	18	34
East Ayrshire	26.0	17	33	25.3	13	33	25.2	14	33	26.0	11	33
East Dunbartonshire	26.7	17	33	27.3	20	33	26.9	16	33	27.5	17	33
East Lothian	26.0	9	33	26.8	20	33	26.1	14	33	26.6	20	33
East Renfrewshire	27.5	18	33	26.3	12	33	27.3	12	33	28.7	16	33
Edinburgh, City of	27.7	14	33	27.5	17	33	26.4	15	33	25.4	15	33
Falkirk	26.8	17	33	26.0	10	33	25.9	18	33	26.0	12	33
Fife	25.9	6	33	25.8	10	33	25.4	5	33	26.2	13	33
Glasgow, City of	25.3	5	33	24.9	11	33	24.8	9	33	24.4	13	33
Highland	23.4	1	33	23.4	1	33	22.2	1	34	25.5	1	34
Inverclyde	25.8	20	34	24.7	13	33	24.7	18	32	25.6	15	33
Midlothian	25.4	17	33	27.1	21	33	26.6	15	33	27.1	19	33
Moray	25.7	10	32	25.8	16	32	24.9	17	33	25.5	17	33
North Ayrshire	26.0	18	33	25.9	16	33	25.8	15	33	25.9	9	33
North Lanarkshire	25.1	7	33	24.7	7	33	25.2	8	33	25.3	10	33
Orkney Islands	23.1	15	29	20.6	1	27	21.2	12	30	21.6	11	33
Perth and Kinross	25.9	13	34	24.6	17	33	24.3	13	32	24.2	12	33
Renfrewshire	26.7	18	33	27.2	15	33	26.7	17	33	27.3	1	33
Shetland Islands	20.5	16	29	19.9	13	29	19.0	10	27	19.8	11	29
South Ayrshire	26.6	16	33	26.8	10	33	25.6	11	33	26.8	12	33
South Lanarkshire	25.4	7	33	26.2	12	33	25.2	12	33	26.8	16	34
Stirling	25.1	14	33	24.2	7	32	24.0	8	33	26.3	14	33
West Dunbartonshire	26.4	21	33	26.3	16	34	25.0	17	31	26.3	18	33
West Lothian	26.5	12	33	25.9	10	33	25.5	10	33	25.7	13	33
Western Isles	18.4	2	31	22.9	19	29	18.6	1	31	22.0	4	32

NHS Treatment Costs

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average cost of NHS treatment per patient in Scotland. [650]

Mr. Galbraith: The average cost of acute hospital treatment per patient in the Scottish Health Service in 1996–97 was £850 for an inpatient and day case and £150 for an outpatient.

Education Costs

Mr Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the average annual cost of educating *(a)* a primary pupil and *(b)* a secondary pupil in Scotland. [646]

Mr. Wilson: Current expenditure per pupil in local authority schools in Scotland in the financial year 1994–95, the latest year for which information is currently available, was £1,797 in the primary sector and £2,874 in the secondary sector.

Feu System

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to *(a)* reform or *(b)* abolish the feu system. [1065]

Mr. McLeish: The Scottish Law Commission is reviewing this area as part of its Fifth Programme. Once the Commission has reported we will be considering the best way of taking forward the Government's commitment to abolishing the feudal system in the light of that report.

Skye Bridge

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the price paid by the Scottish Office to Mr. Tom Farmer in respect of Eileian Ban in connection with the construction of the Skye bridge. [1202]

Mr. Chisholm: It is normal practice for The Scottish Office to release the purchase price of land acquired for road construction schemes. In this case, however, at the vendor's request, it was agreed that the purchase price of Eilean Ban would not be divulged by the Scottish Office to a third party without the prior consent of the vendor.

Arable Area Payments

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the *(a)* maximum, *(b)* minimum and *(c)* average payment made under the arable area payments scheme in 1996–97. [1722]

Mr. Chisholm: Payments which have been made to farmers in Scotland under the 1996 arable area payments scheme area as follows:

(a) Maximum: £414,321[1]

(b) Minimum £71[1]

(c) Average £15,389[1]

[1]All figures are to the nearest pound.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Ministerial Offices

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what sites other than Sanctuary Buildings the Department plans to build a designated Ministerial Office. [772]

Dr. Howells: The Department has no plans to build any further designated Ministerial Offices.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when work on building the Seventh Ministerial office in Sanctuary Buildings began; and when it was completed. [774]

Dr. Howells: During the Election period the Department took the opportunity to improve Ministerial accommodation in Sanctuary Buildings. Amongst the changes undertaken was the creation of a new Ministerial office to replace one of the existing six offices.

Work to create the seventh Minister's office began immediately following the Election on 2 May and was completed on 5 May.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of building the seventh Ministerial office in Sanctuary Buildings. [773]

Dr. Howells: £11,086

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the cost of building a designated Ministerial office at the Department's Moorfoot site. [775]

Dr. Howells: £6,600.

School Budgets (Unitary Authorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the impact on school budgets of the creation of unitary authorities; what estimate he has made of the impact of the change on the number of teachers; and what steps he proposes to take to alleviate budget reductions arising out of the change to unitary status. [1043]

Mr. Byers: It is for unitary authorities, like other education authorities, to determine for themselves what the size of their schools budgets should be in the light of local priorities. We are presently reviewing the education element of the Standard Spending Assessment to ensure a fairer distribution of government grant. This may well benefit unitary authorities.

Business in the Community

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assistance he proposes to give to the Business in the Community initiative. [1040]

Mr. Byers: My right hon. Friend will consider what support he might give to Business in the Community on receipt of a developed proposal.

University Grants

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the current level of grant given by his Department to each of the universities. [1049]

Dr. Howells: Under the Funding and Higher Education Act 1992, the Department pays grant to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which in turn distributes it to universities and colleges. The Act prohibits the Government from intervening in the allocation of grant to individual institutions.

The Funding Council announced the funding allocations for the academic year 1997–98 in February 1997. A copy of the Circular has been placed in the Library.

Graduates

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate his Department has made of the number of graduates who *(a)* find employment, *(b)* are unemployed, *(c)* have debt outstanding and *(d)* suffer bankruptcy within one year of graduating. [1047]

Dr. Howells: Of the 214,000 full-time degree graduates from HE institutions in the UK in the 1994–95 academic year, data on destinations six months after graduation are known for 178,000 of them. Of these, 106,000 entered employment and 15,000 were assumed unemployed. The remainder either entered further training, were not available for employment or training, or were overseas students returning overseas. The information requested on debt and bankruptcy is not held centrally.

Educational Opportunity

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the conclusions of the National Funding Council for Higher Education study on the chances of children from different social class backgrounds going on to study in university; and what steps he intends to take to improve the educational opportunities of disadvantaged children. [965]

Dr. Howells: The report by the Higher Education Funding Council for England on the influence of neighbourhood type on participation in higher education points out that the variation of participation in higher education by social group is closely related to educational achievement up to 18 years of age. The report, which has been submitted to the Dearing Inquiry into Higher Education, confirms the need for action to be taken to improve standards in schools. The Government has put the raising of standards for all pupils at the heart of its agenda for change. It has set clear targets for literacy and numeracy, namely that by the end of this Parliament every child should reach the appropriate National Curriculum levels for age 11. If these demanding targets are met, the educational opportunities for all children will be greatly improved, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds who hitherto have often under-achieved. A copy of the report will be available shortly and will be placed in the Library.

Grammar Schools (Referendums)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on *(a)* the range of persons who will be entitled to vote in referendums called in pursuit of the Government's policy for determining the future of existing grammar schools and *(b)* the procedures under which such referendums will be initiated. [977]

Mr. Byers: The Government has made clear that any changes in the admissions policies of grammar schools will be decided by local parents. Implementing that commitment will require legislation and details will be set out in due course.

Employment (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his Department's initiatives to increase the number of those from ethnic minority backgrounds in work. [1039]

Mr. Andrew Smith: At present we are developing plans to implement our manifesto commitment to reduce unemployment and welfare dependency, particularly amongst young people. I will ensure that people of ethnic minority origin benefit from this programme. I also intend to ensure that all the Department's policies, programmes and initiatives effectively meet the needs of those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Higher Education Students (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of students in higher education are from ethnic minority backgrounds; and what initiatives he proposes to take to increase their number. [1041]

Dr. Howells: Ethnic minorities are well represented in higher education compared to their representation in the population as a whole. Nearly 12 per cent. of home students in the UK are from ethnic minority backgrounds, even though they form only 6 per cent. of the total GB population and 8 per cent. of the population aged 16 to 24 years.

Student Debt and Employment

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research relating to other countries regarding student debt and employment figures his Department has evaluated. [1048]

Dr. Howells: No information is held centrally on student debt in other countries. Available information for other countries on graduate employment is contained in OECD's "Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators" publication, a copy of which is in the Library.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will review the current arrangements in which persons in receipt of the jobseeker's allowance cannot reclaim travel expenses when signing on if their home is within a specified distance of the jobcentre. [1018]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We have no plans to do so. It is a very long-standing practice that jobseekers bear their own costs for their normal fortnightly attendance at the Jobcentre.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places, at which schools and at what cost were provided under the assisted places scheme in the Bournemouth area of the Dorset local education authority in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [1219]

Mr. Byers: there is one school participating in the assisted places scheme in the Bournemouth area, Talbot Heath School. In academic year 1995–96 there were 138 assisted pupils at the school and the total cost of the places was £525,000. In the current academic year 1996–97 there are 164 assisted pupils and the cost is estimated to be £630,000.

Training

Mr. Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the expenditure by the North London district of the Employment Service excluding administration costs, at cash and constant prices, in each year since 1987–88 on *(a)* Training for Work, and the programmes it replaced, *(b)* Youth Training and Modern Apprenticeships, and the earlier YTS, *(c)* the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, *(d)* Jobclubs, *(e)* Restart courses, Jobplan workshops and Workwise, and *(f)* Community Action; and if he will make a statement. [839]

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 22 May 1997]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Bernie Grant, dated 2 June 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question regarding expenditure by the North London District of the Employment Service on a number of programmes since 1987. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

The table below outlines expenditure by the North London District of the Employment Service on Jobclubs, Restart, Jobplan, Workwise and Community Action since 1993. I will turn to the other programmes you mention later. I should explain that we have only provided information going back to 1993 because it is our policy to hold records of expenditure regionally for three years. However, I hope that you will find the information given below helpful. I ought to say that Workwise was not introduced until April 1995 and that the Community Action programme ran from November 1993 to June 1996.

Expenditure

Name of programme	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Jobclub	1,197,413	1,276,546	1,304,239	688,463
Restart	312,179	233,850	178,438	166,616
Jobplan	751,440	627,135	410,119	415,907
Workwise	n/a	n/a	129,051	112,427
Community Action	125,375	541,500	508,473	48,760

I should explain that some of the programmes and employment initiatives you mention do not fall under the responsibility of the Employment Service. These are Training for Work (TfW), the Enterprise Allowance Scheme and Youth Training, Modern Apprenticeships, and the earlier YTS. This means that the North London District of the Employment Service did not incur any expenditure on these programmse and initiatives.

I hope this is helpful.

Funding (Grant-maintained Schools)

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his policy towards the funding of grant-maintained schools; and if he will make a statement about the level of funding to individual grant-maintained schools in *(a)* the current financial year, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [1283]

Mr. Byers: We are committed to establishing a funding system which does not discriminate unfairly between schools or pupils. For 1998–99 and beyond, we will consult widely about how best to achieve that. Funding for grant-maintained schools in 1997–98 is calculated under The Education (Grant-maintained and Grant-maintained Special Schools) (Finance) Regulations 1997.

Assisted Places

Dr. Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those schools offering assisted places, indicating the number of places currently taken up in each, broken down by parliamentary constituency or in such other form as the information is available. [1428]

Mr. Byers: I refer the right hon. Member to the Answer I gave on 20 May to the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan), *Official Report*, 20 May 1997, column *32*.

Education Spending (Devon)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will increase the resources available to Devon county council for education spending during the 1997–98 financial year. [1312]

Mr. Byers: We have no plans to amend the local government finance settlement for 1997–98. We will announce our intentions for 1998–99 in the autumn.

Special Measures Schools

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each local education authority how many school students are in schools in special measures; and what percentage of total school student numbers this represents. [1336]

Mr. Byers: The information requested is contained in a number of tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Konver Grant (Rochford and Southend East)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which organisations, and for what purposes, received the £105,000 Konver grant provided to the Rochford and Southend East constituency, which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Howarth) referred to in his oral statement on 22 May. [1691]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The recipient of the Konver grant will be Southend Enterprise Training Ltd. The purpose of the grant is to help prepare workers from the Atomic Weapons Establishment in Foulness, which closed in October 1996, for work outside the defence industry. I will write to the hon. Member providing more detailed information and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Standard Spending Assessments

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to review the way the education element of standard spending assessments is calculated in the shire counties. [1535]

Mr. Byers: We are currently reviewing the education SSA methodology for 1998–99 in consultation with local authority representatives.

Welfare to Work

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people he estimates will benefit from his welfare to work proposals in the constituency of Wirral South; and on what time scale. [1563]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Currently there are just under 500 people between the ages of 18 and 24 who are claiming JSA in the Wirral South constituency, around half of whom have been out of work for more than 6 months. These young people, if they are still unemployed when our New Deal plans are implemented, will be offered opportunities to participate in a job, training or useful work experience.

The Government's commitment is to get 250,000 young people off benefits and into work. Work to take forward our Welfare to Work provisions started within days of the election, and they will be implemented as soon as possible.

Unemployment (Young People)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage reduction in youth unemployment he plans to achieve by the end of 1998. [1645]

Mr. Alan Howarth: It has not been the practice of Governments to forecast unemployment. This Government is committed to ensuring for young people unemployed for more than six months a job, training or useful work experience. This will bring new help and new hope to young adults in need of work, and we have made the development and implementation of these proposals one of our most urgent priorities.

Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will make a statement on the arrangements made for redundancy payments to the staff of the Grant-Maintained Schools foundation; [568]

(2) when he expects the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation to be closed; [569]

(3) what sum of money would be saved by his Department in the current financial year by closing the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation at the end of May 1997. [570]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 20 May 1997]:* Under the Government's proposed new framework of foundation, community and aided schools, grant-maintained status would no longer exist. There is thus no further need to allocate public funds to the Grant-Maintained Schools Foundation to provide information and advice to schools about GM status. The Foundation's chairman has been informed that grant will cease at the end of June. It is for the Foundation in the first instance to consider the consequences for its employees. Provision of £840,000 was made for the Foundation's grant in the Department's estimates for this financial year. £213,000 is being paid as grant up until the end of June.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Jammu and Kashmir

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of India to permit foreign journalists and representatives of human rights organisations unrestricted access to Jammu and Kashmir. [1024]

Mr. Fatchett: We attach great importance to respect for human rights throughout the world. We hope that the Indian Government will allow greater access to Jammu and Kashmir for human rights organisations. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary reiterated our concerns on Kashmir to the Indian Prime Minister's envoy last week. We are not aware of any restrictions on media access to Kashmir.

Congo

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent events in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [1035]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The end of the Mobutu regime and the advent of a new government in the former Zaire, now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, brings important new opportunities and possibilities for the people of that country and our relations with it. We welcome the fact that the changeover of power in the capital has been achieved without widespread violence.

We hope and expect that Laurent Kabila and his forces will ensure discipline and stability and promote reconciliation in the difficult days ahead. We have urged Mr. Kabila to ensure decent treatment for the refugees in his country and full access to them by humanitarian agencies now that the fighting is over. We are deeply concerned by the situation in the eastern part of the country and reports of the killing of refugees. We are addressing this serious problem bilaterally and with our partners in the EU and at the UN. We look forward to establishing a constructive relationship with the incoming administration.

We welcome Mr. Kabila's commitment to convene a constituent assembly and to hold elections and his stated commitment to human rights. We hope the transitional

authority will be as broadly based as possible and that it will bring with it the much needed respect for human rights and the rule of law so long denied to the people of the country. The support of the international community will be essential if these hopes and plans are to be speedily realised. The British Government will play its full part, with its partners in the United Nations and the European Union, in helping to construct a better future for all the people.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government intends to recognise the Democratic Republic of Congo. [1029]

Mr. Lloyd: The Government's policy is to recognise States not governments. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the new name of the State recognised by the United Kingdom and formerly known as Zaire. The Government has accepted the new name as the official name of the country. The change of name has no effect on UK recognition of the State itself.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when and where the next talks between his Department and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are scheduled to take place. [1038]

Mr. Fatchett: We are aiming to hold a further round of talks at official level in London during the autumn.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what investigations are planned into possible holdings and assets of the former Mobutu regime in the United Kingdom and dependent territories; and if steps will be taken to return them to the people of Congo. [1028]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We will do all that we can to assist, but for obvious reasons I cannot comment in detail on the nature of any investigations.

Korea

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the discussions between his Department and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in Pyongyang in March. [1034]

Mr. Fatchett: Officials visited Pyongyang from 18–22 March. The meeting was the most recent contact at official level with the North Koreans. The North Koreans were encouraged to resume a dialogue with South Korea; to participate in the Four Party Talks; and to continue a full implementation of the nuclear framework agreement with the United States.

Leghold Traps

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* Canada, *(b)* the United States and *(c)* Russia on the need for an agreement to phase out leghold traps in order to avoid an EU import ban. [855]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Neither my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary or I have had the opportunity for discussions about leghold traps with my American, Canadian or Russian colleagues.

Land Mines

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to participate in an international ban on anti-personnel land mines. [1044]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We will work constructively in the Ottawa Process, which aims for agreement on an effective international ban on anti-personnel landmines by the end of this year. We shall also push in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva for a wider ban.

Unemployment

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have to co-operate with other European Union member states on EU initiatives to tackle long-term unemployment. [1082]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We believe that tackling unemployment must be one of the EU's top priorities. Within the Inter-governmental Conference we have signalled our support for a new Treaty Chapter on employment which would provide a basis for future co-operation between Member States in this area, including on initiatives to help the long-term unemployed.

Poland

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom relations with Poland. [1085]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Britain enjoys excellent relations with Poland. We have built up a strong partnership since 1989 which extends across a wide range of areas. The quality of bilateral relations is reflected in the number of high level visits which have taken place, in particular Her Majesty the Queen's highly successful State Visit to Poland in March 1996 and President Kwasniewski's Guest of Government visit to the UK last October. HMG continues to make good use of the opportunities generated by the State Visit to promote British interests and enhance our relations with Poland.

South Africa

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit the Republic of South Africa. [1455]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no such plans at present, but he would hope to visit South Africa before long.

Kashmir

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he intends to take to secure the release of the British travellers held captive in Kashmir. [1454]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We are deeply concerned about the welfare of Keith Mangan and Paul Wells. It is now 23 months since they were abducted. There have been no demands from the hostage takers and no proof of life since late 1995. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the British hostage families on 22 May. We are committed to finding out what has happened to Keith,

Paul and the other two hostages and will take every opportunity to raise the case with the Indian and Pakistani Governments.

Kenya

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he plans to make to the Government of Kenya regarding the human rights situation. [1478]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We will treat respect for human rights as an important element in determining our overall relationship with Kenya. We will take every suitable opportunity to remind the Government of Kenya of their obligations and to make clear our concerns on this subject, including in the run-up to legislative and presidential elections.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1245]

Mr. Fatchett: In 1996 this Department established a millennium programme, beginning with a review of existing systems. It is now locating and fixing specific problems; and ensuring that all new or upgraded systems are millennium compliant. We estimate that all our key systems will be millennium compliant by 31 March 1999.

GCHQ

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will consider claims for compensation from former employees of the Government Communications Headquarters whose employment was terminated for refusing to give up their membership of independent trade unions; and if he will make a statement; [1269]

(2) what plans he has to grant compensation to former employees of the Government Communications Headquarters whose employment was terminated for refusing to give up their membership of independent trade unions. [1268]

Mr. Robin Cook: As part of this Government's commitment to open and fair relations in the workplace we have restored normal Trade Union rights to the staff of GCHQ. Those who left as a result of the 1984 decision accepted compensation where appropriate at the time.

British Council

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the level of his Department's grant to the British Council. [1462]

Mr. Fatchett: The level of FCO grant-in-aid to the British Council was published in the Departmental Report. For this year, the grant-in-aid is set at £97.7 million. This enables the Council to maintain a presence in 229 posts in 109 countries. The Council makes a major contribution to the achievement of many of the UK's foreign policy objectives, including the enhancement of the UK's influence and prestige overseas, the spread of good government and the promotion of exports.

Turkey

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he proposes to make to the Turkish Government in respect of their refusal to arrest and extradite Asil Nadir. [1453]

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he made to the Government of Turkey to secure the return to the United Kingdom of Asil Nadir. [1637]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We remain in close touch with the Turkish authorities about Nadir. A warrant for his arrest has been issued and the Turkish authorities have been requested to effect an arrest. We await a response from the competent Ministerial authority.

Venezuela

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what guidelines his Department issues for United Kingdom passport holders travelling to Venezuela for the purpose of *(a)* tourism, *(b)* business and *(c)* transit. [1487]

Mr. Fatchett: The current advice issued *to all* United Kingdom passport holders travelling to Venezuela which is available on the INTERNET and CEEFAX states:

"Difficult economic conditions have caused a surge in crime in all areas of Venezuela, particularly in Caracas and Maracaibo, some targeted against foreigners. There have also been incidents involving tourists in Margarita. Street robberies and car-jackings can occur anywhere. Do not carry large amounts of money or valuable jewellery and dress down. Care should be taken at all times and walking in city streets should be avoided at night. Use taxis wherever possible. Colombian terrorists and narcotic gangs are active in regions bordering Colombia where there has been a recent increase in kidnappings. Do not travel in the border area except in well escorted groups. Visitors are advised to register at the British Embassy in Caracas telephone 993 4111."

Visas

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the waiting times for *(a)* visas and *(b)* interviews relating to visa applications in respect of United Kingdom posts at (i) Bombay, (ii) Islamabad, (iii) New Delhi, (iv) Calcutta, (v) Karachi, (vi) Dacca, (vii) Washington, (viii) New York, (ix) Dar-Es-Salam, (x) Nairobi and (xi) Lagos. [1477]

Mr. Fatchett: In view of the amount of detail needed to answer this question, my noble friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to expand the use of Gibraltar airport. [1499]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The development of the airport should contribute significantly to the development of Gibraltar's economy. We are ready to consider any practicable proposal which is acceptable to all parties.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 19 May, *Official Report*, column *14*, if Her Majesty's Government and the Spanish Government agree upon the existence and extent of the territorial sea adjacent to the coast of Gibraltar under British sovereignty. [1500]

Mr. Henderson: We are clear that the territorial sea adjacent to the coast of Gibraltar is under British sovereignty. The Government of Spain disagrees.

Amsterdam Treaty

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department will, in co-operation with other departments, provide a cost assessment for implementing articles 118 and 119 of the draft Amsterdam treaty. [1719]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Article 118 and 119 of the draft IGC treaty would not have any direct cost implications in themselves. It is clearly not possible to assess now the cost of legislation which may be brought forward under these articles in the future. But the Government will assess carefully all future proposals for legislation, taking fully into account their likely cost both to industry and to the taxpayer.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the relationship is between article B of the draft Amsterdam treaty and the Schengen Protocol in the same draft. [1734]

Mr. Henderson: Currently the relationship between draft Article B and the draft Schengen Protocol is unclear. The matter remains under discussion at the Inter-Governmental Conference.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what would be the effect of the application of article Fa in the draft Amsterdam treaty to a state refusing to comply with treaty law. [1726]

Mr. Henderson: Draft Article Fa would provide a mechanism for determining whether sanctions could be imposed on a member State. It would be for the Council to determine whether a refusal to comply with Treaty law merited sanctions and if so what sanctions would be appropriate. The draft article is still under discussion at the Intergovernmental Conference.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, under article F in the draft Amsterdam treaty, the European Union could undertake further acts of European integration without the need for further treaties. [1724]

Mr. Henderson: The Presidency's draft revised article F would emphasise the principle that the European Union is founded on, and should respect, fundamental rights. The revised article F, like the current text of the article, confers no power to adopt legislation or other measures. It could therefore not be a basis for "further acts of European Integration".

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on article 113(5) of the draft Amsterdam treaty. [1714]

Mr. Henderson: The Government do not support the proposed amendments to article 113 as currently drafted. We shall be participating fully in discussions in the Intergovernmental Conference and seeking amendments which meet our concerns.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the areas of policy-making which the draft Amsterdam treaty would change from being subject to unanimity to being subject to a qualified majority vote in the Council of Ministers. [1738]

Mr. Henderson: The document, circulated by the Dutch Presidency on 16 May, makes no recommendations on which areas of policy making might move from unanimity to qualified majority vote. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department will, in co-operation with other departments, provide a cost assessment for the United Kingdom of applying the common concern principle in the Title on Employment as set out in the draft Amsterdam treaty; and what assessment he has made of the effect on inward investment to the United Kingdom of applying that principle. [1720]

Mr. Henderson: Negotiations on the draft Employment Title are continuing. The Government's assessment is that including in the title the idea that Member States shall regard their employment policies as a matter of "common concern" would not have significant cost implications nor any impact on inward investment in the UK.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Amsterdam treaty proposals concerning European Union peacemaking. [1713]

Mr. Henderson: We support proposals for the incorporation into the treaty on European Union of "humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking" as issues covered by the Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy. These tasks would continue to be carried out by the Western European Union, which formulated and agreed them in 1992 as part of that organisations' implementation of its role agreed at Maastricht in 1991.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, according to the draft Amsterdam treaty, British diplomats will act under British or European Union instructions in the event of a conflict of interests under article J. [1735]

Mr. Henderson: British diplomats will continue to represent British interests at all times and will act under instructions from the British Government.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what would be the effect of the application of article Fa in the draft Amsterdam treaty to a state declining to apply a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights. [1733]

Mr. Henderson: Draft Article Fa would provide a mechanism for determining whether sanctions could be imposed on a Member State. It would be for the Council to determine whether a refusal to apply a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights merited sanctions and if so, what sanctions would be appropriate. The draft article is still under discussion at the Intergovernmental Conference.

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on article J.13 of the draft Amsterdam treaty and the circumstances in which a member state could be overruled when a common foreign policy position is being sought. [1715]

Mr. Henderson: Article J.13 of the draft Treaty is the subject of current negotiation in the Intergovernmental Conference. The Government does not foresee circumstances in which a Member State could be overruled against its wishes.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1686]

Mr. Fatchett: This Department's leaflet on British Consular Services Abroad is available in large print. We also provide an automated telephone answering service providing recorded travel advice on destinations which give rise to the most enquiries. Advice on other destinations is available from the Travel Advice Unit whose members can read out the advice or provide hard copies in large print. We are currently discussing with the RNIB how we can best publicise these services through RNIB publications. Other publications aimed at an overseas audience are not available in Braille, audio tape or large print.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the names of the political and special advisers appointed to his Department since the general election. [1625]

Mr. Robin Cook: Special Advisers who have been appointed are Andrew Hood and David Clark.

Zaire

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what diplomatic contacts have been made with the new regime in Zaire; and if he will make a statement. [1747]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Her Majesty's Ambassador in Kinshasa met Mr. Kabila on 24 May. He was one of the first Ambassadors to do so. The Embassy in Kinshasa is in contact with other members of the Alliance in line with normal diplomatic relations with an incoming administration. I also refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave today to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz).

Immigration Staff

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many officials are employed in the Migration and Visa Correspondence Unit; what is the average time it takes to deal with an hon. Member's inquiry; and how many outstanding cases there were on 5 May. [1823]

Mr. Fatchett: There are 12 officials working in the Correspondence Unit. The Unit's target for replying to letters from hon. Members is 15 working days. There were 195 letters awaiting reply on 11 May; the figure for 5 May is not available.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff deal with immigration-related issues in the posts at *(a)* Bombay, *(b)* New Delhi, *(c)* Calcutta, *(d)* Islamabad, *(e)* Karachi and *(f)* Dacca. [1824]

Mr. Fatchett: Excluding the head of post or mission, the number of staff dealing with entry clearance issues (though not all are full time) in the Posts referred to are as follows:

	Number
(a) Bombay	41
(b) New Delhi	49
(c) Calcutta	4
(d) Islamabad	95
(e) Karachi	21
(f) Dacca	55

Japan

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has for compensation for former prisoners of war in Japanese prison camps. [1515]

Mr. Fatchett: We recognise the great sacrifices made by those who suffered in Japanese prison camps in the Second World War, and share the widespread public sympathy and concern for them. We accept that the question of compensation was legally settled in the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty. Strong feelings, however, continue in this country and we are in close contact with the Japanese Government about these concerns.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1687]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: This Department has a Programme for Action to achieve equality of opportunity for disabled staff. We seek to ensure that our policies take full account of human rights, including those of disabled people.

TREASURY

Bank of England

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals he has for the tenure of *(a)* the Governor, *(b)* Deputy Governor and *(c)* Members of the Court of the Bank of England; and how he plans to meet the requirements of the Maastricht treaty in this area. [287]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Government propose that the Governor and the two Deputy Governors will be appointed for five year terms. The non-Executive Members of the Court will be appointed for three year terms. The Government's decision to give the Bank operational responsibility for setting interest rates is a British solution, designed to meet British domestic needs for stability. Decisions on EMU will be taken if and when required, and will have to be agreed by Cabinet, Parliament and the people.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the measures he has proposed for the independence of the Bank of England meet all the requirements for bank independence in the Maastricht treaty. [299]

Mr. Brown: No. The measures proposed are different in a number of key respects. Further legislation on the Bank would be required if the UK wanted to join EMU.

Landfill Tax

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list the environmental bodies which enrolled with ENTRUST under the landfill tax credits scheme; [609]

(2) if he will list the projects which have been endorsed by ENTRUST for funding with the money so far disbursed, indicating their projected budget, and their location. [610]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 21 May 1997]:* A list of the environmental bodies enrolled under the landfill tax credits scheme, the projects which have been endorsed for funding with the money so far disbursed and their location has been placed in the Library. The information on the projected budget for each project is currently unavailable but I will ensure that it is placed in the Library as soon as it becomes so.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money has been paid to ENTRUST by waste companies under the landfill tax credits scheme. [616]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 21 May 1997]:* ENTRUST has been notified by the environmental bodies of receipts of contributions under the scheme totalling some £1.5 million to date.

Mrs. Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money ENTRUST has received from its one per cent levy on money paid to environmental bodies under the landfill tax credit scheme. [617]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 21 May 1997]:* ENTRUST has invoiced the environmental bodies that have informed it of receipts of contributions under the scheme. So far it has received £5,795.26.

Single Currency

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of United Kingdom companies, by industry sector, currently preparing for the introduction of the single currency. [1016]

Mrs. Liddell: The wholesale financial sector will be immediately affected by introduction of the single currency, whether or not the United Kingdom participates. Preparations in this sector are now advanced. The need for preparations by other businesses depends on whether the United Kingdom adopts the single currency, and the sector in which they operate, given that the introduction of banknotes and coins will take place about three years after participating countries adopt the euro. My impression is that the preparedness of companies varies, though I have no estimate of the number of firms by industrial sector which are making preparations.

Road Fuel Duty

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his Department's policy in respect of the annual rate of increase of road fuel duty. [1001]

Dawn Primarolo: This government recognises the importance of the rate of road fuel duty in meeting our commitments to reducing emissions of CO_2. Together with colleagues I shall be considering how best to make a contribution towards this commitment.

Furs Ban

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans HM Customs and Excise have to enforce the ban on furs caught by leghold traps if and when it comes into force. [852]

Dawn Primarolo: In the event of the introduction of an EU wide ban of furs from animals caught by leghold traps, fur imports from third countries will be subjected to regulatory checks by Customs making full use of their electronic entry processing system and to appropriate anti-smuggling activities. Customs' legal powers of confiscation would apply to any furs imported in breach of such a ban just as they do to any other prohibited goods.

Interest and Exchange Rates

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the increase or decrease in *(a)* the real and *(b)* the nominal rate of interest in May 1997 over that in the last quarter of (i) 1973, (ii) 1976, (iii) 1985, (iv) 1991, (v) 1992 and (vi) 1995; [961]

(2) what was the increase or decrease in *(a)* the real and *(b)* the nominal exchange rate against (1) the deutschmark and (2) the United States dollar in May 1997 over the last quarter of (i) 1973, (ii) 1976, (iii) 1985, (iv) 1991, (v) 1992 and (iv) 1995. [962]

Mrs. Liddell: The interest rate data can be derived from Table 7.10 and Table 7.2A of Financial Statistics, published by the ONS.

The nominal exchange rate data can be derived from Table 29 of Main Economic Indicators, published by the OECD. The real exchange rates can then be calculated using the consumer prices indices in Table 18.

Married Couples (Taxation)

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer over what time scale he has instructed the Inland Revenue to complete the report into the taxation of married couples announced by the former Financial Secretary on 17 March; and if he will publish it. [1223]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The Government have asked Martin Taylor to conduct a review of the tax and benefits systems. This will concentrate on streamlining and modernising the tax and benefits systems so as to promote work incentives, reduce poverty and welfare dependency, and strengthen community and family life.

Building Societies (Share Certificates)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the legal responsibilities of building societies which convert to banks in respect of informing investors that they are entitled to receive the share certificate for their windfall shares. [1221]

Mrs. Liddell: Once a building society has converted to a bank, the new company is obliged to issue certificates to its shareholders, unless the shares are dematerialised. Where this is so, the Uncertificated Securities Regulations 1995 requires that new shares are issued in uncertificated form only to those who are system members of CREST. As this requires positive action, the default position is that newly converted societies are obliged to issue shareholders with certificates, unless they have elected to become members of CREST, and receive uncertificated shares. So the question of an obligation to inform shareholders that they are entitled to a certificate does not arise.

In addition, shareholders are free to elect a nominee to hold shares on their behalf. Those who do so would also not receive a certificate, even if the shares have not been dematerialised, because they are registered in the name of the nominee, not the shareholder.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received in respect of the issue of share certificates by the Halifax building society as a result of its flotation on the stock exchange; and if he will make a statement. [1222]

Mrs. Liddell: None.

Business VAT Returns

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many random checks on business value added tax returns were carried out in each of the last three years for which figures are available, by region and ethnicity of the business owner. [1110]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs does not hold the statistics requested.

Private Health Insurance (Tax Relief)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the annual financial saving to the Exchequer from abolishing tax relief on private patient insurance schemes for the elderly. [1099]

Dawn Primarolo: The total tax relief on private medical insurance contracts for individuals aged 60 or over is estimated to be about £120 million in 1997–98.

Banking Supervision

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will include in his proposals for banking supervision arrangements for auditors of all banks regulated under the Banking Act 1987 to be appointed by the regulatory body. [1537]

Mrs. Liddell: We have no plans to include such arrangements.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1688]

Mrs. Liddell: If requested Treasury publications would be made available in braille using braille transcripton services. However to date this has not been requested.

Similarly, if requested, the Treasury could make arrangements to have publications produced on audio tape.

However as these services cannot be provided in-house, they are not publicised as Treasury services.

In addition, all public Treasury documents are produced in the optimum typeface sizes (at least 12 point). These are also available on the Internet, where they can be heard by visually handicapped people who have access to a "talking computer" or can be printed out as text of any size.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to graduate the rate of vehicle excise duty by the fuel efficiency of the vehicle. [1002]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are keeping all options for vehicle excise duty under review.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many of those eligible to vote he estimates were not registered to vote at the time of *(a)* the 1987 General Election, *(b)* the 1992 General Election and *(c)* the 1997 General Election. [1493]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 2 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question asking how many of those eligible to vote he estimates were not registered to vote at the time of (a) the 1987 General Election, (b) the 1992 General Election and (c) the 1997 General Election.

There is not enough information to give a reliable figure for those missing from the Electoral Register. It is not possible to compare registration figures with estimates of the resident population directly because these two sources are not compiled on the same basis. The differences between the coverage of the Electoral Registers and the mid year population estimates have been published in Appendix B to the ONS publication '1996 Electoral Statistics' series EL no. 23, a copy of which is attached.

An approximate figure has been calculated for the UK resident population who were eligible to vote in 1987 and 1992 and, relative to the number of electors registered in 1987 and 1992, this suggests that 2.6% and 4.5% of those eligible to vote were not registered in these two years respectively.

An estimate cannot be made for those registered at the time of the 1997 General Election because mid year estimates for the resident population at the preceding mid year are not yet available. This will be possible to do when the ONS publish the 1996 mid year population estimates which is planned for August 1997.

The table below shows the numbers of parliamentary electors in Great Britain between 1976 and 1996 collated by ONS and the General Register Office for Scotland from returns made by local Electoral Registration Officers. These are compared with roughly corresponding estimates of the resident population.

	Parliamentary electors	*Approximate corresponding resident population at preceding mid-year*[1]	*(a) as percentage of (b)*
	(Thousands) (a)	*(Thousands) (b)*	
1976	39,739	40,870	97.2
1981	41,069	42,108	97.5
1982	41,405	42,369	97.7
1983	41,642	42,584	97.8
1984	41,906	42,859	97.8
1985	42,048	43,167	97.4
1986	42,305	43,470	97.3
1987	42,563	43,722	97.4
1988	42,596	43,965	96.9
1989	42,492	44,164	96.2
1990	42,533	44,360	95.9
1991	42,424	44,502	95.3
1992	42,583	44,628	95.4
1993	42,565	44,713	95.2
1994	42,624	44,781	95.2
1995	42,727	44,861	95.2
1996	42,808	45,012	95.1

[1] Persons aged 17 and over, together with 63 per cent of those aged 16, who became 18 during the period when each register was in use. No account has been taken of adults who died between the mid-year reference date for population estimates and the 10 October qualifying date for the following year's electoral register.

The ratios in the final column suggest that coverage of the electoral register has been steady in recent years, after a decline in the period between 1986 and 1991. However, these ratios need to be treated with care and do not represent the proportion of eligible persons who were on the register at their qualifying address for a number of reasons:

- the electoral register (the numerator) contains some redundant entries for people who had already moved elsewhere or died at the time when it was compiled but whose names were nonetheless carried forward to a new register;
- the electoral register contains some legitimate dual registrations, for example by students and owners of second homes;
- the electoral register, but not the population estimates (the denominator) includes overseas voters and service voters who are living abroad; the population estimates include residents who were ineligible to be on the electoral register because they were neither British Commonwealth nor Republic of Ireland citizens.

The effects of these various factors, which operate upon the ratios in both directions, are not known precisely.

A small sample survey (Electoral registration in 1991—S. Smith, ONS (1993)) carried out by ONS following the 1991 Census of Population gave a central estimate of 92.9 per cent. (standard error 0.36 per cent.) for the proportion of eligible residents in Great Britain who were registered as electors at their usual addresses. This figure needs qualification, too. It relates to people who lived in private households, and it does not cover people who were not enumerated in the Census. On the implausibly extreme assumption that all people missed by the Census were also missing from the electoral register where they lived the proportion of eligible people covered by the latter could have been as low as 91.0 per cent.

Those living in London, attainers and young adults, people who had changed their residence within the last year, New Commonwealth citizens in the non-white ethnic groups, and those living in rented accommodation were all found more likely than other people to be missing from the electoral registers.

Overseas Electors

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, by parliamentary constituency, the total number of overseas electors registered in each constituency in the United Kingdom. [844]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Michael Colvin, dated 2 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question about overseas electors registered in each constituency in the United Kingdom.

ONS have published, by parliamentary constituency, the number of overseas electors on the 1997 Electoral Registers for the United Kingdom. This information was published on 26 March 1997 in ONS Monitor EL97/1, and is available in the Library.

Interest Rates (Bank of England)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the role of the Bank of England's agents in the setting of interest rates. [1122]

Mrs. Liddell: Interest rate decisions will be made by a Monetary Policy Committee, on the basis of a majority vote. The MPC will require regional and sectoral information for the purposes of monetary policy formation, including reports from the Bank's agents. The non-Executive Members of the Court will review the performance of the MPC, with particular regard to whether the Bank is collecting proper regional and sectoral information.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Roy Beggs: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the methods by which the numbers unemployed in the United Kingdom are quantified. [1431]

Mrs. Liddell: The Director of the Office for National Statistics is responsible for deciding the form, coverage and timing of release of statistics issued by his Office, taking into account the views of customers. ONS is presently consulting customers on the future presentation of labour market statistics; the consultation exercises was

launched through an article in the Labour Market Trends published on 8 May. Comments on the proposals should be sent to ONS by 14 June.

The proposals set out for consultation reflect the House of Commons Employment Select Committee recommendation that more prominence should be given to the measure of unemployment which is based on the internationally agreed ILO definition.

Bereavement Allowance

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend eligibility for the widows bereavement allowance to widowers. [593]

Dawn Primarolo: There are no plans to extend the widows bereavement allowance to widowers.

Budget Statement

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to make his Budget Statement. [1909]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I am pleased to announce that the Budget Statement, promised in the manifesto, will be on Wednesday 2 July.

Inland Revenue (Salisbury Office)

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the future of the Salisbury local office of the Inland Revenue. [74]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 19 May 1997]:* Salisbury Tax Office is not currently proposed for a closure under the Inland Revenue's long-term programme of office restructuring.

Unemployment (Humberside)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by each year of age, the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female 18 to 25-year-olds currently unemployed in Hull. [145]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 May 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 2 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent question (145) on the number of (a) male and (b) female 18 to 25 year olds currently unemployed in Hull travel-to-work area (TTWA) by each year of age.

ONS produce two measures of unemployment. The first, derived from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS), is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and counts as unemployed people who are: a) without a paid job; b) available to start work within the next two weeks and c) have either looked for work in the last four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained.

ONS also publishes the monthly claimant count, which is based on the administrative system and includes all people claiming unemployment-related benefits (i.e. Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support or National Insurance credits) at Employment Service offices on the day of the monthly count, who on that day had signed on as unemployed and available to do any suitable work. Essentially, all people who attend an Employment Service office to sign are counted, irrespective of whether they are actually receiving benefit.

The information you have requested for Hull is only available from the claimant count and is shown in the attached table.

Unadjusted claimant unemployment in Hull TTWA in April 1997

Age band	*Male*	*Female*
18	396	251
19	466	236
20–24[1]	2,362	771

[1] It is not possible to separate individual years from the total, the nearest claimant count approximation relates to the number of unemployed 20–24 year olds.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females aged 18 to 25 years are currently unemployed in Kingston upon Hull, North; what percentage of the national total for this age bracket this figure represents; and if he will break down these figures into totals for males and females; [144]

(2) how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females in Hull aged 18 to 25 years are currently unemployed; and what percentage of the national total for this age bracket these figures represent. [143]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 May 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 2 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent questions (143 and 144) on unemployment in the Kingston upon Hull North parliamentary constituency and Hull travel-to-work area (TTWA).

ONS produce two measures of unemployment. The first, derived from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS), is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and counts as unemployed people who are: a) without a paid job; b) available to start work within the next two weeks and c) have either looked for work in the last four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained.

ONS also publishes the monthly claimant count, which is based on the administrative system and includes all people claiming unemployment-related benefits (i.e. Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support or National Insurance credits) at Employment Service offices on the day of the monthly count, who on that day had signed on as unemployed and available to do any suitable work. Essentially, all people who attend an Employment Service office to sign are counted, irrespective of whether they are actually receiving benefit.

The information you have requested is only available from the claimant count and is given in the attached table. Figures are not available for the 18 to 25 age band, and those for 18 to 24 are shown instead.

Unadjusted claimant unemployment aged 18-24 years as a percentage of the total unemployed in April 1997

	Males		*Females*	
	Number	*percentage of total unemployed*	*Number*	*percentage of total unemployed*
Parliamentary Constituency				
Kingston upon Hull North	1,088	0.36	424	0.35
TTWA				
Hull	3,224	1.08	1,258	1.03

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list by each year of age the number of 18 to 25 year-olds currently unemployed in Kingston upon Hull, North; and if he will break down each year's figures into totals for males and females; [146]

(2) how many *(a)* males and *(b)* females have been unemployed in *(a)* Hull and *(b)* Kingston upon Hull, North for more than (i) six months, (ii) 12 months, (iii) 18 months and (iv) 24 months. [147]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 19 May 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Kevin McNamara, dated 2 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to your recent questions (146 and 147) on unemployment in the Kingston upon Hull North parliamentary constituency and Hull travel-to-work area (TTWA).

ONS produce two measures of unemployment. The first, derived from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS), is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and counts as unemployed people who are: a) without a paid job; b) available to start work within the next two weeks and c) have either looked for work in the last four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained.

ONS also publishes the monthly claimant count, which is based on the administrative system and includes all people claiming unemployment-related benefits (i.e. Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support or National Insurance credits) at Employment Service offices on the day of the monthly count, who on that day had signed on as unemployed and available to do any suitable work. Essentially, all people who attend an Employment Service office to sign are counted, irrespective of whether they are actually receiving benefit.

The information you have requested for Hull and Kingston upon Hull North is only available for the claimant count, accessible from the Nomis database at the House of Commons Library.

Fuel (Value Added Tax)

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the gain per annum to the average family if VAT on fuel were reduced from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. and the net gains to pensioners if the VAT fuel subsidy was withdrawn accordingly. [619]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 May 1997]:* The estimated full year gain in 1997–98 for the average household; if VAT on domestic fuel and power was reduced from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent., is about £18 per annum. Amongst households with a pensioner head, the average gain is slightly under £16 per annum. The VAT fuel subsidy was designed to compensate pensioners and other vulnerable groups with average spending on fuel and power. If the subsidy were reduced to directly reflect the reduced expenditure on fuel and power there would, on average, be no net gain or loss.

Correspondence

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his letter of 15 May, for how many days before any Budget it will be inappropriate for Treasury Ministers to comment on written representations from hon. Members and given hon. Members a personal reply. [1057]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 May 1997]:* From the time that Treasury Ministers write to let hon. Members know, which will normally be two to three months before a Budget.

Windfall Levy

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much the proposed windfall tax on the privatisation utilities is likely to generate *(a)* in the first 12 months of its operation and *(b)* over the next five years. [213]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 22 May 1997]:* The Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce details of the windfall levy in his Budget Statement.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the companies which will be subject to a windfall levy; and if he will make a statement. [763]

Mr. Robinson *[holding answer 21 May 1997]:* The Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce details of the windfall levy in his Budget Statement.

Nolan Committee

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his proposed appointments to the Bank of England monetary policy committee will be subject to procedures recommended by the Nolan committee. [179]

Mrs Liddell *[holding answer 21 May 1997]:* The committee will include the Governor and two Deputy Governors appointed by the Government, and two members appointed by the Governor. It will also include four other members appointed from outside the Bank by the Government. They will be recognised experts. They will be allowed to engage, with the Government's approval, in other activities which do not give rise to a conflict of interest.

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Alastair Campbell and Mr. Jonathan Powell

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the terms and conditions under which Mr. Alastair Campbell and Mr. Jonathan Powell are employed as civil servants at No. 10 Downing Street. [758]

The Prime Minister: Alastair Campbell is employed as my Press Secretary and Jonathan Powell as my Chief of Staff. There are precedents of such appointments under previous Conservative administrations. Both are employed as Special Advisers, under terms and conditions based on the model contract for Special Advisers, which I have placed in the Library today. The salary arrangements and paybills for Special Adviser appointments and other relevant information will be announced in due course. Special Advisers are normally restricted to an advisory role. As previously announced, an amendment has been made to the Civil Service Order in Council, providing for an exception to this rule for a maximum of three appointments in my office.

Political Appointments

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister how many political appointments have been offered and

accepted in No. 10 Downing Street, in the Cabinet Office and in any other department and agency; and if he will list the comparable numbers before the change of Government. [1704]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) today. There were 38 such paid appointees in post as at 27 February 1997.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the political advisers and other political appointees to the civil service made since 1 May; if each appointment has been approved by him; what is the total annual salary bill of such political advisers and other political appointees; and what was the equivalent bill in 1997 prices of the equivalent appointments made in the two weeks following 3 May 1979. [753]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 May 1997]:* In relation to my office, I refer the hon. Member to the list of appointments I have given today to the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley).

For other Cabinet Ministers, I have approved, subject to agreement on their salaries, the following Special Advisers who will be paid from public funds:

Minister	*Name of appointee*
Minister Agriculture, Fisheries and Food	Tim Walker Cathy McGlynn
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster	Andrew Lappin
Secretary of State for Defence	Alasdair McGowan
Secretary of State for Education and Employment	Conor Ryan Sophie Linden
Deputy Prime Minister	Joe Irvin
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs	Andrew Hood David Clark
Secretary of State for Health	Joe McCrea
Home Secretary	Norman Warner Ed Owen
Secretary of State for International Development	Daniel Harris Jessica Crowe
Lord Privy Seal	Marianne Morris Damian Welfare
Secretary of State for National Heritage	Julian Eccles John Newbiggin
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland	Nigel Warner Anna Healy
President of the Council	Ian McKenzie
Secretary of State for Scotland	Murray Elder Wendy Alexander
Secretary of State for Social Security	John McTernan Liz Kendall
President of the Board of Trade	Dan Corry Sheila Watson
Minister of State Transport	Kate Davies
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Ed Balls Charles Whelan
The Chief Secretary, Treasury	Edward Miliband Andrew Maugham
Secretary of State for Wales	John Adams Huw Roberts

In addition, Michael Barber has been appointed as the Standards and Effectiveness Adviser to the Department of Education and Employment. I will provide the information on the total salary bill when agreement has been reached with each individual on their precise employment terms.

In the two weeks following 3 May 1979, five Special Adviser appointments were made, at a total salary bill in 1997 prices of £163,000.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Prime Minister how many political appointments to his Private Office, Press Office and elsewhere in Downing Street have been made since 30 April; and how many such appointees were in place on 30 April 1996. [1575]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the list of appointments in the reply that I have given today to the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley).

Eight such appointees were in place on 30 April 1996.

Mr. Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the name, function and salary of each political appointee in No. 10 Downing Street and associated offices, stating by whom the salary is paid, or whether the appointment is unpaid. [1705]

The Prime Minister: As we made clear during the election campaign, I believe it is important to bolster the centre of Government and bring in fresh ideas, while at the same time maintaining and supporting a politically neutral civil service.

I have approved the following Special Adviser appointments in No. 10 Downing Street:

Policy Unit

David Miliband
Robert Hill
Peter Hyman
Roger Liddle
Liz Lloyd
Pat McFadden
Geoffrey Mulgan
Geoffrey Norris
James Purnell
Derek Scott

Press Office

Alastair Campbell
Tim Allan
Hilary Coffman

Chief of Staff

Jonathan Powell

Diary Secretary

Kate Garvey

Assistants to Mrs Blair

Fiona Millar (part time)

Roz Preston (part time)

Planning and visits

Anji Hunter

As special advisers, all will be paid from public funds. Salaries for special advisers are being negotiated individually. Staff in the political office will be paid from Labour Party funds.

UN General Assembly

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Prime Minister which Ministers will represent the United Kingdom Government at the United Nations General Assembly special session in New York on 23–27 June. [106]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 21 May 1997]:* I shall be attending the Special Session and will be addressing the General Assembly on 23 June. My right hon. Friends, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for International Development and my hon. Friend, the Minister for the Environment will also attend.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, is playing an active role in preparations for the Special Session, but it is not clear at this stage whether he will be able to attend.

Freedom of Information Bill

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what factors underlay his decision not to introduce a Freedom of Information Bill in the present session. [574]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 21 May 1997]:* It is important to have full public consultation on the content of this Bill. To this end, we will shortly be setting out the Government's proposals for a Freedom of Information Bill in a White Paper. We then hope to publish a draft bill, for consultation, early in the new year.

Lobbyists

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will ensure that details of all contacts, formal and informal, between Government Ministers and lobbyists are recorded and made available for parliamentary scrutiny. [95]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 May 1997]:* Ministers will in the normal course of business receive deputations from many groups who are concerned to press their own interests or those of their clients. Departments will have a record of all Ministerial meetings, but I do not consider that it would be practicable either to publish all such records or to distinguish particular groups as lobbyists.

Removal Costs

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Prime Minister if public funds were used to pay for the cost of his and his family's move to Downing street. [308]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 20 May 1997]:* There were no additional costs to public funds from my and my family's move to Downing Street.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has evaluated on the incidence of BSE-related conditions in animals other than cattle. [9]

Mr. Rooker: The following table gives the number of confirmed Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) cases in animals other than cattle in Great Britain as at 30 April 1997.

Species	*Number of cases*
Ankole cow	2
Bison	1
Cheetah[1]	3
Domestic cat	77
Eland	6
Gemsbok	1
Kudu	6
Nyala	1
Ocelot	2
Oryx (Arabian)	1
Oryx (scimitar horned)	1
Puma	3
Tiger[2]	1

[1] Plus two litter mates that died in zoos abroad.
[2] Plus another positive but clinically normal.

Until November 1994, with the exception of BSE and scrapie, none of the other TSEs were notifiable. On the other hand, the Government believe that most cases of TSE have been reported to Agriculture Departments and epidemiological investigations have been carried out where possible. With respect to exotic ruminants, risk of infection was primarily associated with consumption of feed, often produced for cattle, which contained meat and bone meal (MBM). With respect to exotic felines and domestic cats, the risk was considered to be associated with consumption of central nervous system tissue which could legally be fed to them until it was banned in September 1990.

No cases of TSE have been found confirmed in canines, although a case of spongiform encephalopathy in a Norwegian dog showing a spongiform change in the brain is under investigation. This is not yet confirmed and speculation about its origin delayed until results are available.

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the disposal of carcases of cattle with BSE in landfill sites between 1988 and 1991 and *(b)* the progress of the Ministry's risk assessment of a set of the landfill sites used for the burials; [967]

(2) if a risk assessment, with special reference to the effect on the water table, is being undertaken regarding the disposal of carcases with BSE at the Darrington Leys quarry. [970]

Mr. Rooker: In the early years of the BSE epidemic, incineration capacity was insufficient to deal with all the cattle involved. Therefore, during the summer of 1988 this department approached North Yorkshire County Council seeking licensed landfill facilities for disposal of BSE suspect cattle. At that time, the County Council was responsible as a waste disposal authority for the granting and supervision of licences under Part I of the Control of Pollution Act 1974. Following an assessment by the authority of the landfill sites then in its ownership, Darrington Leys Quarry was identified by the authority as suitable for the disposal of waste of this kind. The Ministry's records, cross checked with those available to the Environment Agency, indicate that the carcases of fewer than 40 cattle affected, or suspected of being affected, with BSE were disposed of at the Darrington Leys Quarry landfill site between August 1988 and July 1990.

In May last year a sub-group of the independent Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC), which advises Ministers on BSE, considered the issue of BSE and the environment, including the past disposal of BSE suspect cattle to landfill. It considered that although the spongiform encephalopathy agent was not yet fully characterised, there was good evidence to believe that individual molecules were not infectious and that infectivity was associated with macro molecular agglomerations indeed possibly with tissue fragments, albeit small ones. On this basis they concluded it was unlikely that leachate from landfill sites would present a significant risk and there was certainly no justification for taking heroic measures to excavate sites, even those which had previously been used for material such as BSE-confirmed cattle.

The Environment Agency has regulatory responsibility for supervising the safe operation of landfill sites and is in possession of SEAC's advice. The Agency monitors ground water quality in the vicinity of licensed landfill sites as a check for any leachate contamination. The Agency, not this department, is assessing data in respect of all the sites concerned and, in quantitative terms, on a typical selection of identified sites to determine whether there is a possibility of impact on water quality. The Agency is progressing this as quickly as possible and are seeking the views of SEAC on the approach taken.

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the cattle buried at Darrington Leys quarry near Cridling Stubbs were subsequently proved to be carrying the BSE virus following tests by his Department. [968]

Mr. Rooker: Compulsory slaughter of all suspects, with compensation, was introduced from August 1988. Under these arrangements the heads of suspects were removed from the carcases for confirmation of the presence, or otherwise, of BSE and were subsequently incinerated. No BSE suspects have been disposed of by landfilling since 1991, when sufficient carcase incineration capacity came on stream to process the number of cases that were coming forward.

The carcases of fewer than 40 cattle affected, or suspected of being affected, with BSE were disposed of at the Darrington Leys quarry. To establish from records how many of those cattle had BSE would involve disproportionate costs. However, we know from total national figures for BSE suspects that approximately 75 per cent. of cases examined subsequently prove positive. Applying this rate to the cases landfilled at Darrington Leys quarry would suggest that fewer than 30 of the cattle would have been confirmed cases.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 21 May, *Official Report*, column *98*, on the incidence of BSE in the next 10 years, if he will list the assumptions that have been made in anticipating that the BSE epidemic will be close to extinction by 2001. [1512]

Mr. Rooker: The assumptions that were made in predicting future trends in the incidence of BSE are set out in the paper written by Professor R. M. Anderson et al, to which I referred in my answer of 21 May. A copy of Professor Anderson's paper can be found at Appendix 5 of the November 1996 Progress Report which has been placed in the Library of the House. A correction to that paper was published in *Nature* on 20 March 1997.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 21 May, *Official Report*, column *98*, on the projected cost of the cattle cull, what factors underlie the difference between the figures in his answer and earlier estimates of the total cost given by his Department. [1513]

Mr. Rooker: The estimated cost of the selective cull quoted in my reply of 21 May assumes 100,000 animals are slaughtered. It encompasses compensation, disposal and operating costs, but does not take account of EC receipts and consequential savings to the OTMS.

It is not apparent to which earlier estimates my hon. Friend is referring. We are, of course, refining our estimates as the cull proceeds and more information on the actual costs is obtained.

If my hon. Friend wishes to write to me on any specific points I should be happy to respond to them.

Beef

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial assistance he plans to provide to beef farmers in Shropshire during the period that the European beef ban remains in force. [1064]

Mr. Rooker: Shropshire beef farmers continue to benefit from the considerable volume of public expenditure which is being used to underpin the beef market, through the Over Thirty Month and Calf Processing Aid Schemes, and the extended intervention arrangements. In addition, they continue to be able to claim for Beef Special Premium, Suckler Cow Premium and Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowances, through which they received over £13 million in 1996–97.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems will be millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1246]

Mr. Morley: A programme of millennium preparations consisting of a series of parallel projects covering different aspects of the Department's computer systems and the associated technical infrastructure has been established under the general direction of the Department's IT Steering Committee. Another project has been established to address "non-IT" equipment containing embedded microprocessor chip technology, ranging from lifts and security systems to scientific equipment, as these may also be affected.

Current rate of progress is consistent with the targets set by the Central IT Unit of the Cabinet Office and CCTA, namely that:

an audit to identify the work needed to address the date change in the Department's computer systems was completed earlier this year;

prioritised and costed plans for undertaking the work that is needed (which is already underway) will be provided to CCTA by October 1997;

preparations for all business critical systems will have been completed by 31 December 1998, subject where appropriate to a final check of end-of-year financial systems by April 1999.

Water Demand

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the demand for water from (i) organic and (ii) conventional agricultural farms; and if he will make a statement. [1324]

Mr. Morley: The Department has commissioned research on present and future irrigation water requirements and the value of various water conservation methods and irrigation techniques in meeting those requirements. The research does not distinguish between organic and conventional agriculture. The final report of the study is expected shortly.

Set-aside Land

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what area of land is currently under set-aside; what percentage this is of agricultural land; and what are the equivalent figures in other EU Member states. [1326]

Mr. Rooker: The information requested is not yet available for the current year. Most farmers have only recently submitted their 1997 IACS applications which detail the areas they have set aside. However, the figures for 1996, as compiled by the European Commission, are given in the following table. The obligatory set-aside rate in 1996 was 10 per cent. but under the Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) small scale producers do not have to set land aside. In addition, farmers may enter more than the minimum 10 per cent. of their arable area into set-aside if they wish.

Member State	*Set-aside (hectares)*	*Set-aside as percentage of land in the AAPS*[1]
United Kingdom	485,020	11
Austria	115,340	10
Belgium	17,640	4
Denmark	220,712	11
Finland	169,807	13
France	1,405,629	10
Germany	1,206,903	12
Greece	15,255	1
Ireland	22,977	8
Italy	229,581	5
Luxembourg	1,745	5
Netherlands	9,532	2
Portugal	57,386	6
Spain	1,313,621	14
Sweden	308,656	19
EU total	5,579,804	11

[1] Land in the AAPS does not include pasture or areas sown to crops outside the scheme.

Waste Disposal (Hurd Deep)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what environmental monitoring his Department's radiobiology laboratories have conducted at the Hurd Deep site off Alderney; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy for monitoring and compiling data on the disposal of toxic waste at sea. [1434]

Mr. Morley: MAFF has carried out monitoring for radioactivity in marine materials from around the Channel Islands since 1965, and from around the Hurd Deep itself since 1989. Materials sampled include fish, shellfish, seaweed, sediments and seawater. Results of this monitoring are compiled and published annually along with other result's of MAFF's programme for monitoring levels of radioactivity in the marine environment around the UK. Copies of these publications are placed in the Library of the House. The results show that man-made radioactivity around the Channel Islands is detectable but that levels are very low and give no cause for concern.

The Department also carries out an extensive programme of monitoring and research related to non-radioactive contaminants and the effects of disposal of waste at sea. The dumping of toxic waste at sea is not permitted.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the disposal of intermediate level radioactive waste arising from the UK Atomic Energy Authority's Research programme at the Hurd Deep. [1438]

Mr. Morley: Between 1950 and 1963, around 15,720 tonnes of radioactive waste was disposed of in the Hurd Deep. Most of this material originated from the UKAEA facility at Harwell, and it contained, in total, around 14.6 TBq of alpha activity and 47.0 TBq of beta and gamma activity. All of this waste was categorised at the time as low level. It is possible that very small amounts of waste which today would be regarded as intermediate level were included, but the overall levels of radioactivity in the material are low. Exposure of Channel Islanders to man-made radiation is less than 3 per cent. of the

recommended limit for members of the public, and is only a tiny fraction of the radiation dose received from natural sources.

Water Usage

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what statistics his Department collates on the amount of water used each year *(a)* on individual farms, *(b)* in farming areas and *(c)* in the agricultural industry as a whole; and if he will make a statement. [1325]

Mr. Morley: A Survey of Irrigation of Outdoor Crops is held periodically. The most recent survey covered the 1995 crop year, in England. Information about the amount of water used is collected from individual farms, but it is not possible to publish individual details for reasons of confidentiality.

The estimated total volume of water applied in 1995, for outdoor crops, was as follows:

Standard statistical region	*Volume of water applied (thousand cubic metres)*
North	924
Yorkshire and Humberside	17,767
East Midlands	27,676
East Anglia	62,560
South East	24,707
South West	5,552
West Midlands	21,839
North West	3,041
England	[1]164,067

[1] Figures do not add to total due to rounding.

Results of the 1995 Survey were published in MAFF Statistics Notice 222/96 (revised).

Organic Farming

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what area of land is currently farmed organically; what percentage this is of agricultural land; and what are the equivalent figures in other EU Member States. [1327]

Mr. Morley: As at 30 April 1997, there were 50,772 hectares of land in organic production in the UK. This represents about 0.3 per cent. of the total agricultural land available.

Available information shows that in 1996 organically farmed land constituted less than 1 per cent. of total agricultural area in Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal and Spain; between 1 per cent. and 2 per cent. in Finland, Germany, Denmark and Italy; between 3 per cent. and 4 per cent. in Sweden; and between 7 per cent. and 8 per cent. in Austria.

[Source of EC statistics: "Impact of EC Regulation 2078/92 on the development of organic farming in the European Union, Dr. Nicolas Lampkin, Welsh Institute of Rural Studies, Aberystwyth"]

Arable Area Payment

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the *(a)* maximum, *(b)* minimum and *(c)* average payment made under the arable area payments scheme in 1996–97. [1723]

Mr. Rooker: The highest payment made for a claim under the 1996 Arable Payments Scheme in England was for £2,007,993. The smallest payment that could be claimed was £60.68 but some claimants may have received less than this because of the application of administrative penalties under the Scheme. The average total payment per claim is estimated to be £23,605.

Animal Identification

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 21 May, *Official Report*, column *102*, on animal identification, what is the Community's deadline for the introduction of the database. [1516]

Mr. Rooker: 31 December 1999. But it is my intention to introduce a computer database well ahead of the Community's deadline.

Technetium (Lobsters)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what level of technetium has been reported in lobsters obtained from the Irish Sea in the vicinity of Sellafield. [1787]

Mr. Morley: Levels of technetium -99 in lobsters from the Irish Sea close to BNFL Sellafield are reported in the MAFF report—Radioactivity in Food and the Environment, 1995. The average level in lobsters was 8,300 Bq/kg in 1995. In 1996 the level rose to 17,900 Bq/kg in the second quarter and then reduced to 6,430 Bq/kg in the last quarter. The annual radiation exposure to the most exposed group associated with lobster consumption was 18μSv in 1995 and 29μSv/year in 1996. This can be compared with the public dose limit of 1000μSv/year and presents no food safety concerns.

Flood Alleviation

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will reassess the need for the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton Flood Alleviation Scheme with particular reference to climate changes; and if he will make a statement. [1729]

Mr. Morley: There are no plans to review the need for the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton Flood Alleviation Scheme, which was the subject of a detailed local public inquiry in 1992. The Inspector at the inquiry concluded that there was a compelling need for the scheme to proceed in order to provide protection to some 4,800 households, 700 commercial buildings and major communications links. Also, this Department was satisfied that the Environment Agency's proposed works met the technical, environmental and economic criteria for grant aid.

The possible impact of climate change has been fully considered by the Environment Agency during scheme design. Although there has been a trend towards lower average rainfall in southern England in recent years, studies related to global climate change suggest a possible increase in the frequency and severity of extreme events of the type against which this scheme is intended to provide protection. Whilst there is insufficient evidence to quantify any such changes at present, it would clearly be inappropriate to design the scheme for anything less than the flood conditions experienced in the past 50 years.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

13. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals she has to ensure that retirement pensioners share in rising national prosperity. [889]

Mr. Denham: Our review of pensions will consider the central areas of insecurity for elderly people, including all aspects of the basic pension and its value. In undertaking this review we will ensure that the views of pensioners are heard.

We want to get help to Britain's poorest pensioners and we are commissioning research into the reasons why a million pensioners fail to claim the Income Support to which they are entitled.

Mrs. Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what plans she has for the basic state pension. [887]

Mr. Denham: We will retain the basic State pension as the foundation of security in retirement provision; it has a vital part to play in providing a decent standard of living in retirement. We will increase it at least in line with prices.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly be announcing details of a review of the central areas of insecurity for elderly people. All aspects of the basic pension will be included in our review.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will assess the cost to public funds of restoring the link between pensions and earnings for all pensioners aged 18 years and over on 31 December 1945. [61]

Mr. Denham: The estimated net cost of restoring the link between the higher of the rise in the Retail Prices Index or Average Earnings for uprating the basic Retirement Pension and linked benefits, for those aged 18 years and over on 31 December 1945 is £5.7 billion in 1997–98.

Notes:

1. Costs rounded to £0.1 billion.
2. Estimate assumes that the earnings link is restored from 1980.
3. Estimate of gross costs was provided by the Government Actuary's Department. Net costs, allowing for savings on income-related benefit expenditure, have been modelled using the 1994–95 Family Resources Survey and the May 1995 Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry.
4. Estimate is based on 1997–98 prices, benefits and earnings levels and calibrated to the income-related benefit forecasts underlying the 1996 Departmental Report.

Information Technology

21. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the use of information technology in her Department. [897]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The DSS uses the largest civil computer system in Europe to support the effective and efficient delivery of Social Security services to the people of this country. We will be assessing the Department's plans for Information Technology to ensure that they will provide the improved services, better security and value for money that we want to see in a modernised Social Security system.

Housing Benefit Fraud

22. **Ms Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to take steps to reduce housing benefit fraud. [898]

Mr. Denham: We plan to crack down on dishonesty in the benefit system, and clamping down on housing benefit fraud will be a key priority. That is crucial if the public is to have confidence in the welfare system. A number of measures to help prevent, deter and detect housing benefit fraud will be brought in over the next few months and we shall consider what further measures are needed.

Fraud

23. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures employing new technology she is using to combat social security fraud. [899]

Mr. Denham: New technology is widely used within the Department both to deliver benefits and to combat fraud. Measures include datamatching and the introduction of the Benefit Payment Card.

State Earnings-related Pension Scheme

25. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for the future of SERPS. [901]

Mr. Denham: We intend to set up a review of pensions which will encompass second tier pensions including SERPS. We will retain SERPS for those who wish to remain in it and introduce a "citizenship pension" to help people who lose out on pension entitlements because they assume responsibility as carers.

Benefits Agency

26. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will cancel all pending contracts or other plans to sell or privatise the property or services currently owned or managed by the Benefits Agency and its staff; and if she will make a statement. [902]

Mr. Field: There is no proposal to privatise any Benefits Agency service.

A number of initiatives are in place which are designed to test the value of involving external suppliers in DSS operations. We are reviewing them against our objective to modernise the delivery of the welfare system.

We also need to measure them against our approach to partnership with the private sector; the implications for customer service, staff and the taxpayer; and our commitment to work within announced spending totals for the first two years of the Government.

We will make announcements in due course.

Income Support

27. **Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the number of children in families dependent on income support. [903]

Mr. Keith Bradley: In August 1996 there were around 2.9 million children aged 15 and under living in families dependent on Income Support. Our priority is to develop a modern welfare system which promotes work incentives, reduces poverty and welfare dependency and strengthens community and family life.

Appeal Procedures

Mr. Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations she has received about social security appeals procedures. [894]

Mr. Keith Bradley: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, will be meeting the President of the Independent Tribunal Service His Honour Judge Bassingthwaighte shortly. We plan to modernise the Social Security system and make savings. The framework for decision making and appeals for the next century must be more streamlined, easier for customers to understand and staff to operate.

28. **Ms Mountford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement about social security benefits appeals procedures. [904]

Mr. Denham: We intend to bring forward legislation to improve current decision making and appeals arrangements for all Social Security benefits. Further details will be announced in due course.

Income Support (Minimum Wage)

29. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the impact of introducing a minimum wage on the overall level of income support payments. [905]

Mr. Keith Bradley: We are committed to introducing a national minimum wage, set seriously, decided not on the basis of a rigid formula, but according to the economic circumstances at the time.

We will set up a Low Pay Commission to advise the Government on the level of national minimum wage. The Commission will take into account the economic effects following the introduction of a minimum wage, including any impact on public expenditure.

Tribunal Centres

30. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will meet *(a)* representatives of unemployed workers centres and *(b)* others who deal with social security appeals to discuss tribunal centres. [906]

Mr. Keith Bradley: Tribunal centres are a matter for the President of the Independent Tribunal Service (ITS), His Honour Judge Bassingthwaighte, who informs me that his staff hold regular meetings with trubunal user groups which involve ITS, Benefits Agency staff and representative groups such as the Citizen's Advice Bureau and local Welfare Rights groups.

We plan to modernise the system for decision making and appeals to make it more streamlined and improve the service. We will take into account the views of those people who deal with appeals.

Welfare Reform

31. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the terms of reference of the review being conducted by the Minister of State for Welfare Reform. [907]

Mr. Field: The manifesto set out our objective of providing work incentives and reducing poverty and welfare dependency. The aim of the Department's review will be to develop a strategy by which we will modernise the structure and delivery of social security to:

encourage independence, social cohesion and well being;

develop an active welfare system which supports work, savings and honesty;

help tackle effectively unjustifiable social and economic inequalities.

Spending Growth

32. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to curb the annual rate of growth in social security spending. [908]

Mr. Field: Under the last Government the bills from social and economic failure led to spiralling Social Security costs. We plan to reverse that pattern, beginning with our programme to help young people and the long term unemployed to move from welfare to work.

Welfare to Work Programme

33. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate she has made of the savings to her Department from the introduction of the welfare to work programme. [909]

Mr. Field: We shall consider the impact of the Welfare to Work programme on the Department's expenditure plans as we work up the detail of the various schemes. By improving the standards and skills of the workforce we would expect savings in the longer term.

Lone Parents

34. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's policy towards lone parents on benefit. [910]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The Government believe that the best way to help lone mothers is to provide them with help which enables them to move off benefit and into work. This is a high priority. Most lone mothers want to work and we will give them opportunities to do so as part of our welfare to work programme. We will also implement a national childcare strategy which will match the provision of childcare to the needs of the modern labour market. This will help parents, especially lone mothers, to balance family and working life.

Benefit Dependency (Young People)

35. **Ms Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's proposals for young people who are dependent on benefit. [911]

Mr. Field: It is important that we do everything we can to help young people out of benefit dependency and into work. One of our first priorities is to get the New Deal up and running—this will give 250,000 under 25-year-olds, unemployed for over 6 months, opportunities for work, education and training.

Basic State Pension

36. **Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the level of the basic state pension. [912]

Mr. Denham: We will retain the basic state pension as the foundation of security in retirement provision; it has a vital part to play in providing a decent standard of living in retirement. We will increase it at least in line with prices.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly be announcing details of a review of the central areas of insecurity for elderly people. All aspects of the basic pension will be included in our review.

Future Pensions Provision

37. **Mr. William O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to meet old aged pensioners' organisations to discuss future pensions provision; and if she will make a statement. [913]

Mr. Denham: We anticipate that we will meet representatives of pensioners' organisations as part of the Pensions Review. Details of the Review will be announced shortly.

Civil Service (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many civil servants, of each grade in her Department, were of Asian origin on 5 May. [738]

Mr. Field: The information is in the table:

Grade	*Number of staff of Asian origin*
Senior Civil Service	0
Grade 6	16
Grade 7	1
Senior Executive Officer	3
Higher Executive Officer	24
Executive Officer	503
Administrative Officer	2,064
Administrative Assistant	797
Total	3,408

Information as at 31 March 1997.

Pensioners

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate she has made of the number of pensioners currently living below the poverty line in Britain; [1826]

(2) what plans she has to reduce poverty among pensioners with low incomes. [1825]

Mr. Denham: The poorest pensioners in Britain include the 810,000 to 1,100,000 who do not take up their entitlement to Income Support. We want to get help to them and are commissioning research to establish why they do not claim the Income Support to which is their due.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what estimate she has made of the number of claimants who will have their housing benefit reduced in (a) 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 in (i) Great Britain, (ii) Manchester and (iii) Trafford as a result of the decision to extend the single room rent restriction to single people aged between 25 and 59 years; [1634]

(2) what estimate she has made of the total savings which will accrue in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000 from the decision to extend the single room rent restriction to single people aged between 25 and 59 years. [1640]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The extension of the single room rent to single people under age 60 was inherited from the previous administration, and it forms part of Departmental expenditure plans. We are reviewing those plans and will announce our decision shortly.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will estimate the shortfall between total housing benefit payments to each London borough and their payments and administrative costs in respect of the benefit. [1753]

Mr. Bradley: The information for 1995–96, the latest date for which figures are available, is in the tables.

Housing benefit 1995–96 Rent allowance cases and non-housing revenue account element of rent rebate

	Expenditure	*Subsidy*[1]	*Expenditure less subsidy*
Authority name			
Barking	11,578,000	10,826,000	752,000
Barnet	50,542,000	46,344,000	4,198,000
Bexley	21,749,000	19,961,000	1,789,000
Brent	88,288,000	80,419,000	7,869,000
Bromley	50,271,000	46,991,000	3,280,000
Camden	67,352,000	61,873,000	5,479,000
City of London	1,184,000	1,079,000	105,000
Croydon	60,204,000	55,502,000	4,702,000
Ealing	63,188,000	58,636,000	4,551,000
Enfield	42,101,000	38,130,000	3,971,000
Greenwich	32,007,000	29,502,000	2,505,000
Hackney	86,584,000	75,530,000	11,054,000
Hammersmith	49,816,000	45,127,000	4,689,000
Haringey	104,452,000	94,188,000	10,264,000
Harrow	29,619,000	27,317,000	2,302,000
Havering	13,179,000	12,155,000	1,024,000
Hillingdon	26,533,000	24,384,000	2,150,000
Hounslow	35,226,000	31,751,000	3,475,000
Islington	48,025,000	39,601,000	8,424,000
Kensington and Chelsea	56,076,000	51,671,000	4,406,000
Kingston upon Thames	15,080,000	13,680,000	1,400,000

Housing benefit 1995–96 Rent allowance cases and non-housing revenue account element of rent rebate

	Expenditure	*Subsidy*[1]	*Expenditure less subsidy*
Lambeth	n/a	n/a	n/a
Lewisham	49,584,000	45,236,000	4,348,000
Merton	24,107,000	22,273,000	1,834,000
Newham	94,696,000	84,594,000	10,102,000
Redbridge	41,568,000	38,839,000	2,729,000
Richmond upon Thames	18,169,000	16,973,000	1,196,000
Southwark	50,741,000	46,865,000	3,876,000
Sutton	16,076,000	14,863,000	1,213,000
Tower Hamlets	32,370,000	28,882,000	3,488,000
Waltham Forest	49,154,000	44,649,000	4,504,000
Wandsworth	61,457,000	56,403,000	5,054,000
Westminster	90,253,000	82,647,000	7,606,000

Source:

Local authority subsidy claims.

Note:

[1] Figures do not include the 5.5 per cent. of estimated Housing Benefit expenditure fed in through the Revenue Support Grant arrangements.

Housing benefit expenditure 1995–96 Housing revenue account element of rent rebate

	Expenditure	*Subsidy*[1]	*Expenditure less subsidy*
Authority name			
Barking	28,119,000	4,583,000	23,536,000
Barnet	23,590,000	15,023,000	8,567,000
Bexley	13,271,000	5,082,000	8,189,000
Brent	32,625,000	32,452,000	173,000
Bromley	195,000	0	195,000
Camden	54,513,000	54,373,000	140,000
City of London	2,677,000	2,607,000	70,000
Croydon	37,441,000	24,827,000	12,614,000
Ealing	38,835,000	38,283,000	552,000
Enfield	28,933,000	21,337,000	7,596,000
Greenwich	50,529,000	50,377,000	152,000
Hackney	67,097,000	65,316,000	1,781,000
Hammersmith	29,104,000	28,199,000	905,000
Haringey	44,460,000	44,565,000	–105,000
Harrow	14,813,000	10,561,000	4,252,000
Havering	16,809,000	3,731,000	13,078,000
Hillingdon	27,815,000	19,907,000	7,908,000
Hounslow	23,253,000	23,059,000	194,000
Islington	65,755,000	65,194,000	561,000
Kensington and Chelsea	17,195,000	17,124,000	71,000
Kingston upon Thames	11,536,000	6,956,000	4,580,000
Lambeth	61,501,000	60,553,000	948,000
Lewisham	50,513,000	50,160,000	353,000
Merton	15,880,000	8,706,000	7,174,000
Newham	39,317,000	38,268,000	1,049,000
Redbridge	16,568,000	10,735,000	5,833,000
Richmond upon Thames	11,843,000	5,927,000	5,916,000
Southwark	78,539,000	77,941,000	598,000
Sutton	14,646,000	5,519,000	9,127,000
Tower Hamlets	51,974,000	51,448,000	526,000
Waltham Forest	23,213,000	22,979,000	234,000
Wandsworth	44,766,000	41,053,000	3,713,000
Westminster	32,558,000	32,110,000	448,000

Source:

Local authority expenditure returns.

Note:

[1] Figures take account of surpluses within the Housing Revenue Account for each authority.

Administration subsidy

London Boroughs	*(a) 1995–96 estimated Housing Benefit administration subsidy £s including Revenue Support Grant*	*(b) 1995–96 Housing Benefit (claimed) administration costs*	*Shortfall between (a) and (b)*
Barking and Dagenham	629,000	347,000	–282,000
Barnet	1,067,000	2,055,000	988,000
Bexley	606,000	1,016,000	410,000
Brent	1,982,000	3,682,000	1,700,000
Bromley	1,223,000	1,536,000	313,000
Camden	1,961,000	2,991,000	1,030,000
City of London	85,000	199,000	114,000
Croydon	1,293,000	1,963,000	670,000
Ealing	1,436,000	3,763,000	2,327,000
Enfield	865,000	1,711,000	846,000
Greenwich	1,315,000	3,594,000	2,279,000
Hackney	2,150,000	5,627,000	3,477,000
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,409,000	3,166,000	1,757,000
Haringey	2,154,000	6,369,000	4,215,000
Harrow	581,000	896,000	315,000
Havering	557,000	543,000	–14,000
Hillingdon	705,000	1,167,000	462,000
Hounslow	890,000	1,384,000	494,000
Islington	1,641,000	2,733,000	1,092,000
Kensington and Chelsea	1,299,000	2,850,000	1,551,000
Kingston upon Thames	377,000	610,000	233,000
Lambeth	2,481,000	2,616,000	135,000
Lewisham	2,060,000	4,985,000	2,925,000
Merton	646,000	764,000	118,000
Newham	1,914,000	3,426,000	1,512,000
Redbridge	745,000	1,048,000	303,000
Richmond upon Thames	511,000	983,000	472,000
Southwark	1,924,000	3,297,000	1,373,000
Sutton	491,000	793,000	302,000
Tower Hamlets	1,506,000	2,072,000	566,000
Waltham Forest	1,119,000	3,540,000	2,421,000
Wandsworth	1,830,000	2,388,000	558,000
Westminster	1,499,000	4,565,000	3,066,000

Halliday Case

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment her Department has made of the implications for Government policy and expenditure of the recent judgment of the House of Lords in respect of the Halliday case; and if she will make a statement. [1520]

Mr. Denham: The implications of the House of Lords' Judgment are being considered urgently. The Chief Adjudication Officer will issue guidance as soon as practicable. In the meantime, the Benefits Agency are taking all steps necessary to ensure proper compliance with the judgment.

Benefits Statistics

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will publish the income levels of recipients

of benefits relative to the Council of Europe poverty threshold; and if she will make it her policy to publish such figures regularly in the future. [1755]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information is not available in the format requested.

The income levels of benefit recipients vary widely and, in particular, benefits which are not income-related are spread across the income distribution. Information on the distribution of benefit expenditure by household income of recipient is given in the 1997 Social Security Departmental Report, page 47. Information on the numbers of individuals reporting income-related benefit receipt by position in the income distribution is provided in Table G of 'Households Below Average Income'; the analysis for 1979 to 1993–94 was published in November 1996. The Council of Europe decency threshold relates to individual earnings, but the income levels of recipients of benefits are more appropriately measured as total income on a benefit unit or household basis as they are in the publications listed above. It is therefore not meaningful to compare these income levels with the Council of Europe threshold.

Retirement Pensions

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the present value of the basic retirement pension as a percentage of average earnings; and what it will be in the years *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2010, *(c)* 2020, *(d)* 2030 and *(e)* 2040 if it is increased only in line with prices, assuming that average earnings increase by two per cent. more per year than the retail prices index. [1743]

Mr. Denham: The information is in the table.

Year	*Basic standard rate of retirement pension as a percentage of average earnings*
1996	17.4
2000	16.1
2010	13.2
2020	10.8
2030	8.9
2040	7.3

1. The figure for 1996 is based on average full time earnings for all employees in April 1996, from the New Earnings Survey.
2. Forecast figures are on the assumption that average earnings increase by 2 per cent. per year, while the real value of the standard rate of basic retirement pension remains at the 1996–97 level.
3. Percentages in the table are rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 3 June 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the backlog of cases for each of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate's divisions on 5 May. [795]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The latest available information relates to the end of April 1997 and is given in the table.

Cases outstanding[1] in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate at 30 April 1997

	[2]Number
After Entry and Appeals Directorate[3]	20,400
Asylum Directorate[4]	52,400
European Directorate	3,300
Nationality Directorate	61,500
Immigration Service Enforcement Directorate[5]	19,200
Finance and Services Directorate[6]	6,700

[1] Includes unactioned cases and work in progress.
[2] To the nearest hundred.
[3] Including referred entry clearance applications and appeals awaiting preparation of statements.
[4] Cases awaiting an initial decision and asylum appeals awaiting validation and preparation.
[5] Excluding just over 20,000 cases where illegal entry papers have been served but there is an outstanding asylum appeal/application; these cases are included in the Asylum Directorate figure.
[6] Items of correspondence (mainly passports, letters and new applications being sorted and allocated to caseworkers).

Wheel Clamping

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations his Department has received during the last 12 months on wheel clamping; what action he proposes to take to regulate wheel clamping; and if he will make a statement. [1080]

Mr. Michael: Over the last 12 months, the Home Office has received proposals on wheel clamping from the Automobile Association the British Parking Association, and Legislation on Car Clamping. There have been four Parliamentary Questions, letters and suggestions for specific action to deal with the problem from 37 Members of Parliament, two letters from local authorities and 60 letters from members of the public. The Government consider the present situation on wheel clamping on private land to be unsatisfactory, and we will take a fresh look at the options for dealing with the problem.

Police Authorities

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to abolish the present structure of police authorities; and if he will introduce measures to make police authorities *(a)* more representative of and *(b)* more accountable to local communities. [1552]

Mr. Michael: No. There are no national plans at present to change the structure of police authorities. However, in London we are considering arrangements for establishing a new police authority for the Metropolitan Police.

Interpol (Drugs Squad)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources his Department has given to Interpol's drug squad in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [1549]

Mr. Michael: Although a significant proportion of its work is in facilitating international drugs inquiries, Interpol does not have a drugs squad.

The Home Office does, however, contribute to the cost of running and staffing the Europol Drugs Unit (EDU), the European Union centre for the exchange and development of criminal intelligence on drug trafficking and other forms of serious trans-national crime.

The Home Offices's contribution to these costs has been:

	£000
1993–94	68
1994–95	479
1995–96	924
1996–97	803

Some additional costs were incurred by the Home Office as a result of staff time spent on representational, liaison and other duties associated with the work of the Unit.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for facilitating the implementation of CCTV crime prevention schemes by local councils. [457]

Mr. Michael: I am considering the future of the closed circuit television Challenge competition as part of our review of existing expenditure programmes. I want to ensure that the resources available for measures to promote community safety are used to best effect. A decision on whether there will be another round of the competition in 1998–99 will be made later in the summer.

Youth Offender Teams

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources will be available to youth offender teams; what percentage of their funding will be met from local authority budgets; and if he will make a statement. [1577]

Mr. Michael: The Government are committed to a wide ranging reform of the youth justice system. Our proposals include establishing a National Youth Justice Board and local multi-agency youth offender teams to help ensure high standards and consistency in the delivery

of youth justice services. We are currently developing the details of these proposals and will announce these over the coming months.

Prisons

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prisons *(a)* currently under construction and *(b)* being planned indicating when they will be completed, how much each will cost, and how many inmates they will take; and if he will make a statement. [1579]

Ms Joyce Quin: Three new prisons are currently being built under the Private Finance Initiative.

Her Majesty's Prison Altcourse will be a 600 place prison. It is planned that its first prisoner will be received on 1 December 1997. Its Net Present Value (NPV) is £247 million. The NPV covers the costs of construction, finance and operation in terms of fees over the lifetime of the contract.

Her Majesty's Prison Parc will be an 800 place prison. It is planned that its first prisoner will be received on 17 November 1997. Its NPV is £266 million.

Her Majesty's Prison Lowdham Grange will be a 500 place prison. It is planned that its first prisoner will be received on 16 February 1998. Its NPV is £130 million.

The Prison Service plans to provide a further 2,400 places at new prisons over the next three years. Planning approval has been given to re-build Her Majesty's Prison Pucklechurch, near Bristol, as a 400 place prison for males under 21 years old. Plans to build an 800 place prison at Agecroft in Salford are subject to the outcome of a planning inquiry, expected shortly. The remaining 1,200 places will be provided by two more prisons once suitable sites have been agreed.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Government Agenda

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what contribution he intends his Department to make to the presentation and delivery of the Government's agenda. [2076]

Dr. David Clark: I intend to publish a White Paper in the autumn on our programme for the regeneration of government. This will set out our unified approach to providing accountable government which is attuned to people's interests and concerns. I have already announced my intention to publish a White Paper on Freedom of Information before the Summer Recess. I will bring forward proposals on the accountability, efficiency and transparency of Departments, Executive Agencies, and other public bodies. I will develop our commitment to more efficient and effective public services. My Department will consult widely with the general public on our plans to transform the existing programme of charters to deliver what people want from public services; to remove unnecessary bureaucracy from the daily lives of citizens and small business; and to use Information Technology in the delivery of enhanced and accessible services to the public.

My Department will be taking a coherent and energetic approach, looking across departmental boundaries, to realise our aim of accountable, accessible, responsive and efficient government.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Chickens

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many broiler chickens slaughtered in the United Kingdom have been rejected as unfit for human consumption since 24 April 1996. [1120]

Mr. Rooker: The information requested is as follows:

	Total throughput	*Unfit for human consumption*	*Percentage*
Great Britain	695,243,052	8,394,463 (to 27 April 1997)	1.2
Northern Ireland	58,091,168	611,814 (to 24 March 1997)	1.0

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1677]

Mr. Morley: The following material is available in special formats for those with impaired vision or hearing:

The new microwave labels:

Braille booklet

Large print booklet

Audio cassette.

Healthy eating for older people:

Audio cassette

Large print booklet.

These were produced in association with and distributed through the RNIB. The large print booklets are, in addition, available free of charge from MAFF's storage and distribution house.

Food safety in the kitchen: Video in British Sign Language.

Healthy eating: Video in British Sign Language.

These were produced in association with and distributed through the British Deaf Association.

Social Model (Disability)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1678]

Mr. Morley: Within the Ministry, those with responsibility for the development or review of policies or practices are required to consider the potential effect on any particular group, including those with a disability, and consult as appropriate. These requirements reflect the definitions in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and will be reviewed in the light of any relevant amendments.

Scrapie

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cases of scrapie have been confirmed since it became a notifiable disease. [2075]

Mr. Rooker: The following table shows the number of cases which have been confirmed as positive since January 1993 when scrapie became a notifiable disease.

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997 (until end of May)*
Confirmed positive	328	235	254	453	213

Cases are greater in each year than those previously reported on 19 February 1997, *Official Report*, column *635*, owing to the inclusion of cases from research studies which have not been previously reported.

Public Access (Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the total acreage of uncultivated open land and moorland in Lancashire to which the public are denied access solely by reason of ownership. [1017]

Ms Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

We have no information about the extent of uncultivated open land and moorland in Lancashire, nor is there any information about landowners who have been approached about opening up their land to the public.

DEFENCE

White Paper

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to publish the 1997 White Paper on Defence. [1274]

Dr. John Reid: As the Strategic Defence Review will be conducted during 1997, it would not be appropriate for the Department to publish this year a forward-looking statement of policy in the form of the Statement on the Defence Estimates (SDE). Factual material on the activities of the Department and the Armed Forces in the last year, which is usually contained in the SDE, will appear in an expanded MOD Performance Report which the Department plans to publish in the Autumn.

Pricing and Quality Services Organisation

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the Pricing and Quality Services Organisation within the MOD Procurement Executive; and if he will make a statement. [2013]

Mr. Spellar: A new Defence Agency, formed from the Pricing and Quality Services (PQS) elements of the Procurement Executive, was established on 1 June 1997. The agency will be known as Specialist Procurement Services (SPS). The Chief of Defence Procurement will be the Owner of the Agency and the current head of PQS will be the first Chief Executive (CE); subsequent CEs will be appointed through external competition. The Chief Executive has been set the following Key Targets for the first year of operation:

1. Establish Service Level Arrangements (SLAs) with customers, covering the activities of the following business units; Pricing, Quality Assurance and Cost Forecasting.
2. Develop/implement methods of measuring customer satisfaction.
3. Offer Cost Forecasting advice on 90 per cent. of Category A and B equipment projects identified within the agreed Equipment Approvals Committee (EAC) programme.
4. Develop a programme for accreditation to the Investors in People (IIP) standard.
5. Audit 95 per cent. of core accounts in the first year and 100 per cent. of major accounts over a three year period with respect to Government Furnished Equipment (GFE).
6. Develop an efficiency and business improvement programme.

I will arrange for copies of the Agency's Framework Document and Corporate Plan to be placed in the Library of both Houses.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Teaching Staff (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of *(a)* teachers and *(b)* lecturers come from ethnic minority backgrounds; and what initiatives he proposes to increase their number. [1042]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department does not collect the information required. The Teacher Training Agency has introduced various initiatives to attract ethnic minority entrants to teaching, including targeting recruitment advertisements. The Agency is responsible for allocating student numbers to teacher training institutions, based on the quality assessment of the institution. Within any given quality category, trainers with special features, including their record in recruiting people from ethnic minorities, may be given priority over others.

Performing Arts Graduates

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he proposes to take to ensure that the numbers of students graduating in the performing arts in each year more nearly equates to the employment opportunities available to them. [1345]

Dr. Howells: None. Individual universities and colleges are responsible for the allocation of places on performing arts courses in the light of demand from suitably qualified applicants, whose numbers may be influenced by job opportunities.

Salaries (University Vice-chancellors)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will list in rank order the salaries of the vice-chancellors of United Kingdom universities indicating for each institution the number of students enrolled; [1443]

(2) what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of setting a salary scale for university vice-chancellors; [1470]

(3) what factors underlie the range of variation in the salary and benefits packages offered to vice-chancellors by United Kingdom universities. [1469]

Dr. Howells: Universities are independent bodies and it is for them to determine levels of pay for their staff, including the vice-chancellor, in the light of their own particular needs and requirements. Other than requiring that universities take account of the Government priorities for public sector pay, the Department plays no part in considering or setting academic salary scales and does not collect information about the salaries of vice-chancellors.

The Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Scotland and Wales and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland require universities to disclose the salary levels of senior staff. This information is published in the annual accounts of individual universities. Information on student enrolment is published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in its reference volume series: *Students in Higher Education Institutions.*

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer system will be millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1248]

Dr. Howells: The Department's plan for ensuring that all its computer systems will be millennium compliant by early 1999 are well established. A project has been set up which has already identified all the Department's computer systems which will be affected by the Millennium date change. A detailed impact analysis in under way. This project will provide detailed costings covering all the work needed up to the Millennium. We will take forward those changes where they are cost justified.

Funding (Further Education and Tertiary Colleges)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to reform the funding of further education and tertiary colleges; and if he will make a statement. [1461]

Dr. Howells: Under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 it is the statutory responsibility of the Further Education Funding Council for England to give financial support to the governing bodies of institutions in the further and higher education sector for the provision of further education. My right hon. Friend has no plans to change that arrangement.

Training Costs Estimates

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate his Department has made of the amounts currently spent by employers on training; and if he will list equivalent figures for 1987 provided by the Training Agency in the study, Training in Britain (1989); and if he will make a statement. [1233]

Dr. Howells: Employers in the UK are estimated to have spent £10.6 billion on formal training courses and supervised on-the-job training in 1993. This estimate is the latest available and was published in the report 'Employer Provided Training in the UK 1993'. An equivalent figure is not available from the 'Training in Britain' study because of differences in survey methods and the definitions of training used. The study estimated that total expenditure by employers in Great Britain in 1986–87 was £14.4 billion.

Estimating employers' total expenditure on training is inherently difficult. While the latest survey provides a more accurate estimate of expenditure than that previously available, on its own the estimate does not convey much about training behaviour. More significantly, the survey shows a rising trend in the number of employees receiving training, both on and off-the-job. However we know that many companies—especially smaller ones—face difficulties in obtaining the training their businesses need. That is why we have pledged to help them, particularly by making the Investors in People Standard more accessible to small firms, and through the development of a University for Industry.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1681]

Dr. Howells: The Department produces several of its information leaflets and booklets in Braille, on audio tape and in large print. The majority are unpriced and are available from the Department's mailing houses on request. The priced ones are available from The Stationery Office.

The availability of Braille, audio tape and large print is normally publicised by a reference in the standard printed version of the publication along with a telephone number for those wishing to place orders. We also send specimen copies to organisations representing blind people for wider dissemination.

Unemployment (Young People)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many persons aged 16 to 18 years are not in employment, full-time education or on Government programmes. [1648]

Dr. Howells: In Autumn 1996, there were 300,000 16 to 18 year olds not in employment, full-time education or on government programmes in the UK, according to the Labour Force Survey.

Equal Opportunities Commission

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans the Government have to review the role and function of the Equal Opportunities Commission. [2023]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Against the background of this Government's firm commitment to equal opportunities and the practice of quinquennial policy and financial management reviews of non-departmental public bodies, the Department will conduct a thorough review of the Equal Opportunities Commission during 1997–98. The first stage of the review will take the form of a "prior options" study with the following terms of reference:

1. To review the functions of the Equal Opportunities Commission, the effectiveness with which they have been carried out and the likely need in future for these functions.

2. To consider the case for the continued existence of the Equal Opportunities Commission and how its functions can be best fulfilled.

3. To consider the powers, constitutional status, membership and terms of reference of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

4. The review will have regard to the Government's equal opportunities policies and to the duties of the Commission as laid down in statute.

5. To report the outcome of the review by 11 September 1997.

This study is now underway and I would welcome comments from interested parties. Comments, which may be made public unless respondents specifically request otherwise, should be sent, by 4 July, to:

Jane Anderson
Divisional Manager
Sex and Race Equality Division
Department for Education and Employment
Room 401
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London SW1H 9NF.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people are currently undertaking modern apprenticeships; what is his assessment of the contribution of the scheme to redressing the skills balance; and what plans he has for its further extension. [1698]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* In February 1997 (the latest date for which figures are available), there were 76,300 young people in training on Modern Apprenticeships.

The initiative is making a vital contribution to raising skills. Evaluation studies have consistently shown that Modern Apprenticeships are highly popular, of high quality, and are meeting the expectations of both employers and young people.

We want to sustain and build on this success and intend to develop Modern Apprenticeships in every sector where there is a demand. There are currently 69 frameworks approved with a further 10 expected in the next 12 months. There is every sign that employers' demand for Modern Apprentices will continue to grow and we and Training and Enterprise Councils will consider how best to respond to that demand.

WALES

Development Orders

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to review planning policy in Wales in regard to the existence of outstanding interim development orders; and if he will list the non-time limited planning permissions currently in force. [857]

Mr. Win Griffiths: My right hon. Friend and I currently have no plans to review outstanding interim development orders in Wales. There are no non-time limited mineral planning permissions currently in force.

Devolution

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the need for changes in the role of the National Audit Office in relation to public expenditure in Wales in the event of Welsh devolution. [1090]

Mr. Ron Davies: A Welsh Assembly would be subject to rigorous standards of audit and accountability. We will set out our detailed proposals on these and other matters in the White Paper to be published in the summer.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will ensure that all departmental expenditure in support of the Government's campaign for devolution is separately identified. [1087]

Mr. Davies: All Welsh Office publicity expenditure related to the proposals for a Welsh Assembly will be separately identifiable.

Beef Production

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit farms engaged in beef production in Alyn and Deeside. [1305]

Mr. Win Griffiths: My right hon. Friend and I hope to visit farms across Wales when the opportunity arises.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will raise problems faced by beef farmers in Alyn and Deeside with EU officials; and if he will make a statement. [1307]

Mr. Griffiths: My right hon. Friend and I will ensure that the interests of farmers throughout Wales are considered when we prepare for such meetings.

River Dee Bridge

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects both the new River Dee Bridge and Connah's Quay to be open to traffic. [1301]

Mr. Hain: Flintshire County Council are responsible for this scheme. They estimate completion late this year.

Unemployment

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his estimate of the real level of unemployment in *(a)* Merthyr Tydfil and Ryhmney and *(b)* Wales; [1231]

(2) if he will assess the findings contained in the report, "The Real Level of Unemployment", by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam university, a copy of which has been sent to him; and if he will make a statement. [1234]

Mr. Hain: The Office for National Statistics is currently conducting a public consultation on labour market statistics. I welcome this review because I am

extremely concerned at the high levels of joblessness in Wales not measured by the claimant count. I will write to my hon. Friend when the review is concluded.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to take people off benefit and into *(a)* work and *(b)* training; and what will be the role of further education colleges in such plans. [1258]

Mr. Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 21 May 1997, *Official Report*, column 75. The Government's Welfare to Work programme for unemployed young people "the New Deal" will have four options. Three of these: working with employers, voluntary organisations and the environmental task force, will involve accredited training for a day a week. The training could include college based courses and on the job training. The fourth option is full time study towards an approved qualification. I would expect Further Education Colleges to make a significant contribution to the success of the programme.

Film Industry

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to promote the film industry in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [1331]

Mr. Hain: Welsh Office Officials are currently talking to people in the industry about its potential for economic growth. Financial support for the industry is being channelled through the Arts Council of Wales, Welsh Development Agency and Cardiff Bay Development Corporation who are providing grant aid to the new Media Agency for Wales. The Arts Council has also distributed some £1.5 million of Lottery money to film projects throughout Wales.

Open Government

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what initiatives he proposes to enhance openness in government. [1263]

Mr. Ron Davies: We intend to introduce a Bill to strengthen data protection controls and a White Paper will be published on proposals for a Freedom of Information Bill. I shall shortly be announcing improvements to the meetings of the Welsh Grand Committee.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he estimates money saved from the assisted places scheme will become available for local education authority schools; and if he will make a statement. [1255]

Mr. Hain: Subject to Parliamentary approval to the Education (Schools) Bill, savings through the phased abolition of the Assisted Places Scheme will start to become available in the 1998–99 financial year.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the future role of local education authorities. [1259]

Mr. Hain: We value the contribution made by LEAs and look forward to working in partnership with them.

Small Businesses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many small businesses there are in Wales. [1265]

Mr. Hain: Official statistics on small business numbers are not available separately for Wales. The available data relate to VAT-registered enterprises only and therefore exclude many firms with a turnover below the VAT threshold. These figures show that in 1996 some 60,000 VAT-registered enterprises in Wales had a turnover of less than £250,000.

Child Labour

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure the enforcement of existing legislation to outlaw the illegal employment of school age children. [1541]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Government are considering how the existing system for protecting children who work might be improved.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if Wales will have the option of setting its own minimum wage following devolution. [1809]

Mr. Ron Davies: Our plans for a Welsh Assembly do not entail its having powers of primary legislation. On this and other issues, it would operate within the statutory framework applying to the whole of England and Wales.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Youth Court System

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the Government expenditure on the youth court system in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [1576]

Mr. Hoon: I have figures for the magistrates courts system of which the youth court is a part. No separate expenditure figures are published for the youth court alone. However the following estimates are based on total revenue expenditure on magistrates courts apportioned to youth court work in proportion to the total of youth court work to aggregate magistrates court work for each year, measured by the weighted caseload system.

1992–93: £16 million

1993–94: £15 million

1994–95: £18 million

1995–96: £21 million

1996–97: £24 million.

Over these five years the number of defendants dealt with by the youth court has doubled.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what plans there are to ensure that his Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1238]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor's Department, the Court Service, the Public Trust Office, the Public Record Office and the Northern Ireland Court Service have established Year 2000 compliance projects. Their programmes of work follow the recommended approach identified by the Central Information Technology Unit and the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency, recognising their milestones for the completion of key tasks. The Chief Land Registrar will be replying directly to the Question on behalf of the Land Registry.

Letter from Stuart Hill to Mr. Nigel Jones, dated 3 June 1997:

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION–MILLENNIUM COMPLIANCE

I have been asked by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, to reply to your recent question concerning plans to ensure that the Land Registry's computer systems are millennium compliant.

The Registry set up a project early in 1996 to identify potential problems and manage any necessary changes. An investigation has been undertaken in respect of mainframe software to identify all potential problems and the solutions required. The results indicated that 3 per cent. of the software may require attention. Further investigations are also being carried out on our smaller PC based systems and software is tested for use throughout the Registry.

External suppliers of Registry mainframe software have also been contacted to supply information regarding their own plans for millennium compliance. Contract documentation to be used in all future procurements has been revised to ensure that the problem will not be perpetuated in any newly purchased products.

It is our aim that all Land Registry computer systems will be millennium compliant by 1 April 1998 to allow at least one full financial year of operation.

Please let me know if you require any further information.

HEALTH

Capital Developments

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the capital developments for which business cases have been submitted since 1 April 1994 in *(a)* Newcastle City Health Trust, *(b)* RVI and Hexham Trust, Newcastle and *(c)* Freeman Hospital Trust, Newcastle, indicating in each case when it was submitted; where (i) NHS Executive and (ii) Treasury approval was given; when tenders were accepted; and when work started on site. [1334]

Mr. Milburn: The table shows the schemes for which an outline business case has been formally submitted to the National Health Service Executive and where capital costs are above the Trusts' delegated limits.

Scheme	*Outline business case submitted*	*Outline business case approved*	*Full business case approved*	*Tender accepted*	*Start on site*
Freeman					
Pathology Computer Replacement	October 1995	January 1996	[1]—	—	—
Additional Cardiac Catheterisation Lab Suite	October 1995	No—January 1996	n/ap	—	—
Reconfiguration of X-ray room 2	October 1995	No—January 1996	[1]—	—	—
Development of Non-Invasive cardiology facilities	October 1995	No—January 1996	n/ap	—	—
Newcastle Strategic Review Fast Track schemes	January 1996	February 1996	[2]—	—	—
Newcastle City Health					
Improving Old Age Psychiatry Services	October 1995	Conditional—February 1996	Awaited	—	—
Kenton Clinic Development	October 1995	Conditional—February 1996	—	—	—
Special Care Services	October 1995	Conditional—February 1996	—	—	—
North Tyneside Adult Mental Health Services	October 1995	No	n/ap	—	—
Stand Alone Acute Mental Illness Unit	October 1994	December 1994	April 1997	To be sought July 1997	August 1997
Newcastle Strategic Review—Fast Track Schemes—Diabetes Centre	October 1995	February 1996	February 1996	July 1996	July 1996
Newcastle Electrical Infrastructure Improvements	October 1995	December 1994	December 1994	January 1995	work completed 1995
RVI and Associated Hospitals					
Upgrading of Dermatology Accommodation	October 1995	No	n/ap	—	—
Replacement MRI Scanner in Neurosciences	October 1995	August 1996	Awaited	—	—

Scheme	Outline business case submitted	Outline business case approved	Full business case approved	Tender accepted	Start on site
Hexham General Hospital Multi-Storey Car Park	November 1995 May 1994	November 1996 July 1994	Awaited February 1995	— n/av	— September 1996
Newcastle Strategic Review—Fast Track Schemes— Reconfiguration of Medical Services	June 1996	[1]—	—	October 1996	November 1996
Newcastle Strategic Review—Fast Track Schemes— Reconfiguration of Elderly Services	June 1996	[1]—	—	July 1996	August 1996

[1] Schemes adapted where required, progressed using Trust capital allocation (block capital).
[2] Schemes being progressed individually within the overall review.
[3] Single stage business case review (June–September 1996).
n/ap = not applicable.
n/av = not available.

Lariam

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his Department's policy relating to the use of the anti-malarial drug lariam. [1485]

Ms Jowell: Mefloquine (Lariam) is a highly effective drug in both preventing and treating malaria. It is particularly valuable where malaria is resistant to other medicines. The Department's policy relating to the use of mefloquine is outlined in the memorandum "Health Information for Overseas Travel" a free copy of which has been provided to all general practitioners. Further information was included in the Chief Medical Officer's Update 10 (May 1996) which was sent to all general practitioners. As with the use of all medicines, the benefits have to be weighed against the risk of adverse reactions.

We are aware of public concerns about the safety of mefloquine, particularly about the nature of the suspected serious adverse reactions reported. Guidelines for health professionals on the use of malaria prophylaxis, including mefloquine, are prepared by an informal group of experts convened by the Malaria Reference Laboratory of the Public Health Laboratory Service. The guidelines are published, most recently in the British Medical Journal in 1995. The group is presently producing a new set of guidelines which, once the consultation process is complete, will be published as soon as possible.

GP Fundholders

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was paid in fees to general practitioner fundholder managers in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97; and if he will break down the figures by health authority. [1801]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested is not held centrally. General practitioner fundholder managers are paid from the Practice Fund Management Allowance (PFMA) but their salary is not identified as a separate item within total PFMA allocations. The total PFMA expenditure for 1995–96 was £109.6 million and allocations of PFMA for 1996–97 were £153.3 million.

Children (Employment)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure the enforcement of existing legislation to outlaw the illegal employment of school-age children. [1542]

Mr. Boateng: We are considering how the existing system for protecting children under minimum school leaving age who work might be improved.

Prisoners (HIV/AIDS)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department is responsible for funding the treatment of prisoners with HIV/AIDS. [1154]

Ms Jowell: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Missions (Parking Fines)

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many parking fines were incurred by diplomatic missions in London during 1996. [2029]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: During 1996 the London diplomatic missions incurred a total of 1,676 unpaid parking fines, which is slightly more than the 1995 figure of 1,586. In February this year this department wrote to all diplomatic missions to give them an opportunity to pay off all outstanding parking tickets, or appeal to have the ticket cancelled. Since then payments totalling £48,640.00 have been received, compared with £11,600.00 in 1996. The table below shows only missions which have 11 or more fines outstanding.

Unpaid parking fines

Diplomatic mission	1996	1995
1 Malaysia	71	32
2 Bangladesh	62	19
3 Pakistan	61	22
4 Thailand	50	20
5 Egypt	49	20
6 Ghana	47	66
7 Turkey	45	17
8 Cameroon	44	13
9 India	43	83
10 Qatar	42	20
11 Hungary	40	11
11 Cuba	40	6
13 Philippines	39	31
13 Oman	39	22

Unpaid parking fines

	1996	*1995*
15 Morocco	37	6
16 Jordan	36	16
17 Russian Federation	35	15
18 Kenya	34	15
19 Romania	33	27
19 Cyprus	33	16
19 Bahrain	33	5
22 Uganda	30	18
23 Zimbabwe	26	15
23 Portugal	26	4
25 League of Arab States	24	26
25 Azerbaijan	24	13
27 Tunisia	23	7
28 Algeria	21	19
29 Tanzania	20	14
29 Jamaica	20	7
31 Poland	18	12
31 France	18	11
31 Afghanistan	18	8
34 Mexico	16	4
35 Japan	15	9
35 El Salvador	15	1
37 Spain	14	8
37 Brunei	14	7
39 Greece	13	20
39 Peru	13	5
39 Armenia	13	2
42 Albania	12	14
42 Liberia	12	3
44 Mauritius	11	1
44 Belgium	11	0
	1,340	710
International organisations		
1 Commonwealth Secretariat	20	16

Consular Fees

Mr. Sutcliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to change consular fees. [2021]

Mr. Fatchett: An order in Council was made on 20 May which reduces both the cost of a 5 year multiple entry visa and the cost of a certificate of entitlement and completes the 3 staged increase in settlement visa fees designed to achieve full cost recovery in this category. The Order also abolishes the fee for the confirmation of the right of abode (now obsolete). The Order will come into effect on 10 June.

PRIME MINISTER

Question Time

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will estimate the annual reduction in the number of visitors to the Strangers' Gallery during oral questions to him consequent upon the change to their timing. [958]

The Prime Minister: Admission of the public to the Strangers Gallery is a matter for the House authorities.

Disability

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will nominate a Minister in each Department to help identify and to overcome obstacles to ability, employment, education and mobility among people with real or apparent disability; [1227]

(2) what considerations and consultations led him to do without a Minister with overall responsibility for disability issues. [1226]

The Prime Minister: The Government place great importance on ensuring equal opportunities for all groups, including disabled people. By moving the disability portfolio from the Department of Social Security to the Department for Education and Employment the Government has signalled a move away from treating disabled people as recipients of benefit towards a culture which will value their wider role in society as people willing and able to take advantage of education, training and employment opportunities.

My right hon. Friend, the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities now deal with disability issues.

My right hon. Friend will act as a focal point across Government for disability issues and will be working with Ministerial colleagues in their Departments to ensure that the needs of all disabled people are addressed as policies are being developed. In this way, my right hon. Friend will have an input into policy as it affects disabled people whilst responsibility for implementing specific areas will remain with the relevant Departments.

Podiums and Backdrops

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister how much each Department has spent since 1 May on podiums and backdrops. [1224]

The Prime Minister: This is a matter for the individual departments. No central records are kept.

Minister without Portfolio

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister what is the role of the Minister without Portfolio; and for what reason he is excluded from the rota for oral questions. [1225]

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend's role is to assist me and my Ministerial colleagues in implementing Government policy and presenting it effectively.

My hon. Friend is not in charge of a Department. Therefore—in line with the practice of the Minister without Portfolio in the previous administration—he will not have a slot on the rota for oral questions.

Hong Kong

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to attend the hand-over ceremony in Hong Kong. [1467]

The Prime Minister: His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will both attend the hand-over ceremony in Hong Kong. I am still considering whether I will be able to attend.

Horse and Dog Racing

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister which Department has ministerial responsibility for horse and dog racing. [1717]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* Such Ministerial responsibility as there is for horse and dog racing arises from the sport's close links with betting. The Home Office is responsible for the betting legislation.

Government Contracts

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the public relations firms awarded Government contracts in each year since 1992, indicating the nature and value of the contract in each instance. [1639]

The Prime Minister: The information requested is not held centrally for all Government Departments.

Voluntary Organisations and Charities

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 22 May, *Official Report*, column *121*, on the transfer of responsibility for charities and voluntary organisations, if he will publish the responses and a summary of the responses to his policy document, "Building a Future Together", relating to the specific issue of transferring responsibility for voluntary organisations and charities to the Home Office. [1716]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Labour Party Policy Document published in March and the covering letter invited organisations and individuals from the voluntary sector to make their views known on how Government should structure its responsibilities for the voluntary sector. No one argued for responsibility for the sector to remain at the Department of National Heritage and views expressed to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) before and after the election were that there should be a clear focus for Government activity to support, nurture and work with the sector. Representatives of the voluntary sector and other respondents positively welcomed the return of the responsibility to the Home Office.

Medical and Dental Officers

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement about the pay of medical and dental officers in the Armed Forces. [2096]

The Prime Minister: The Armed Forces Pay Review Body has made recommendations on the pay of medical and dental officers in the Armed Forces. The Review Body recommends that the daily rate of basic pay should be increased by an average of 3.4 per cent. from 1 April. They have further proposed some significant changes to the pay structures of Service medical and dental officers which will see many forms of additional payments, such as consultant pay, consolidated into basic pay. The Review Body also mentioned that it welcomed the fact that the Ministry of Defence was, in future, proposing to base the pensions of Service medical and dental officers on representative rates of their own salaries rather than that of their combatant counterparts. These changes will serve to give a greater degree of comparability between the pay of Defence Medical Staff and their counterparts in the NHS.

The Government has decided to accept the Review Body's recommendations. Along with the earlier recommendations of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, and the recommendations of the other Review Bodies, these will be staged, with 2 per cent. of the award being back dated to 1 April, and the remainder being payable from 1 December.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Indemnity Undertakings

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage how many indemnity undertakings were given by departments under section 16 of the National Heritage Act 1980 for the six-month period ended 31 March; and what was the value of *(a)* any contingent liabilities in respect of such undertakings given at any time under that section which remain outstanding as at 31 March, *(b)* non-statutory Government indemnities in respect of loans handled by the Government Art Collection which remain outstanding as at 31 March and *(c)* non-statutory undertakings to Her Majesty in respect of loans from the Royal Collection which remain outstanding at 31 March. [2027]

Mr. Chris Smith: The provision for the Government Indemnity Scheme is made by the National Heritage Act 1980. The scheme facilitates public access to loans of works of art and other objects for public display made to museums, galleries and other such institutions by private owners and non-national institutions. It does this by indemnifying lenders against loss or damage to their loan. Loans covered by the scheme must be for public benefit. The scheme also covers loans of such objects for study purposes within institutions where this would contribute materially to the public's understanding or appreciation of the loan—for example through a scholarly publication.

In the six month period ended 31 March 1997, the following undertakings to indemnify were given under section 16 by the relevant Departments for objects on loan to national and non-national institutions:

	Numbers
Department of National Heritage	469
Scottish Office Education and Industry Department	66
Welsh Office Education Department	65
Department of Education for Northern Ireland	28

The value of contingent liabilities in respect of undertakings given at anytime under section 16 and which remained outstanding at 31 March 1997 is:

Department of National Heritage: £1,337,264,837

Scottish Office Education and Industry Department: £38,701,845

Welsh Office Education Department: £60,611,806

Department of Education for Northern Ireland: £10,678,989

The value of non-statutory Government Indemnities to cover loans handled by the Government Art Collection and which remained outstanding at 31 March 197 is:

Value: £9,000,000

The value of non-statutory Undertakings given to Her Majesty in respect of loans from the Royal Collection and which remained outstanding at 31 March 1997 is:

Value: £100,327,077

National Newspapers

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has for new regulations covering the ownership of national newspapers.[1822]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* I have been asked to reply. My Department has no immediate plans for new regulations covering the transfer of ownership of national newspapers, however the Department of National Heritage is maintaining regular monitoring of the impact of various factors and policies on the media, including control of cross-media ownership.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1666]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I shall be seeking to ensure that any proposed relevant future legislation and guidance issued by my Department reflects our manifesto commitment to establishing:

"comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or at work, developed in partnership with all interested parties".

It will also reflect, as appropriate, the outcome of the consultation being undertaken by the Department for Education and Employment on the issue of the definition of disability.

SCOTLAND

Scottish Homes

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy with regard to the funding of Scottish Homes for the remainder of the present financial year. [87]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 19 May 1997]:* I can confirm that Scottish Homes grant in aid for 1997–98, as set out in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1997–98 to 1999–2000", is £264.899 million.

I am making an additional £1 million available for the Scottish Rough Sleepers Initiative this year. Because this Initiative is funded through Scottish Homes, this extra money will be added to Scottish Homes' grant in aid.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about Government policy on private finance initiative for school building programmes. [1083]

Mr. Brian Wilson: A number of education authorities are considering the potential of the private finance initiative and public private partnerships to assist their school building programmes. We are committed to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of that process and will be offering authorities practical advice and assistance to that end.

Miscarriages of Justice

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to set up the independent body to be established under the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Act 1997 to consider cases of alleged miscarriages of justice. [1275]

Mr. McLeish: My right hon. Friend supports the establishment of an independent Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission in principle, but further preparatory work will be required before a decision can be taken on implementation of the relevant provisions of the 1997 Act. He cannot at this stage say precisely when the Commission might be set up.

Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Act

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consultation he will initiate before seeking to bring into force those provisions of the Crime and Punishment (Scotland) Act 1997 which require his consent or subordinate legislation. [1276]

Mr. McLeish: We intend to consult the judiciary and other interested parties, as appropriate, before making orders under section 65(2) of the 1997 Act.

Fisheries Protection Agency

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about performance targets for the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency for 1997–98. [2011]

Mr. Dewar: For the financial year 1997–98 I have set the following targets:

Aerial surveillance percentage of hours flown on task: 85 per cent.

Aerial surveillance cost per aircraft sighting: £82

Marine surveillance utilisation of effective patrol days: 96 per cent.

cost per boarding: £2,685

Marine surveillance number of boardings at sea: 2,200[1]

Sea Fisheries inspectorate cost per logsheet check: £65

landing declarations checked against actual catches 40 per cent.

80 per cent. of cases for prosecution to be reported within 6 weeks of offence being detected and 95 per cent. within 8 weeks

Number of cases where court proceedings are taken as percentage of offences reported to prosecuting authorities: 80 per cent.

[1] This target is 400 less than that for 1996–97 and reflects the reduction from 300 to nil of Royal Navy patrol days contracted from the Ministry of Defence.

In order to ensure that the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency uses its resources efficiently, I have set it a target to achieve cash releasing efficiency gains of 2.0 per cent. during 1996–97.

The Chief Executive will be directly accountable to me for the achievement of these targets, which will be reported in the Agency's Annual Report.

Boundary Commission

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the members of the Boundary Commission for Scotland. [2010]

Mr. Dewar: My predecessor reappointed Dr. Charles M. Glennie CBE and Professor Urlan A. Wannop to the Boundary Commission for Scotland from 1 January 1997 to 31 December 1997.

The other members of the Commission are:

Madam Speaker—ex-officio, Chairman.

The Hon. Lady Cosgrove, appointed as Deputy Chairman by the Lord President of the Court of Session from 1 January 1997 to 31 December 1999.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the President of the Board of Trade by what means her Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1679]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: In discussions with the RNIB and other interested organisations, the Department seeks to ensure that its publications are accessible to the visually impaired.

To this end, our consumer advice on metrication changes in 1995 was published and distributed in Braille by the RNIB on behalf of the Department. More recently, audio advice about tactile danger warnings and about risks of carbon monoxide poisoning have been made available to those with visual impairment through COI's regular Sound Advice audio tapes, which are distributed to over 4,500 organisations dealing with blind and partially sighted people.

Also guidance will shortly be issued within the Department aimed at making printed material easier to read for visually impaired people.

The Department also has a range of information about its policies, programmes and publications on the Internet (http.\\www.dti.gov.uk\). It is possible to print all DTI pages from the Internet in large print; the pages are also available in audio to those who have access to a Talking Computer.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to ensure that her Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if she will make a statement. [1244]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Following an initial impact assessment, my Department has initiated a programme of changes to its IT systems which will make them compliant with the Century date change. This programme is expected to be completed in the Spring 1999.

Exports

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list on the basis of July to December 1973 = 100, the increase in United Kingdom relative export unit values in dollars for each year since 1970 together with United Kingdom share of volume of exports of manufactures by main manufacturing countries. [1556]

Mrs. Roche: The information requested is not available. Data on relative export unit values are available only from 1975. Data based on 1990 = 100 between 1975 and 1996Q1 are available on the Central Shared Database which can be accessed from the Library. Data on the UK share of exports of manufactures by the main manufacturing countries for 1982 to 1992Q3 based on 1985 weights are published in the February 1993 Monthly Review of External Trade Statistics, a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Fireworks

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations her Department has received in the last 12 months relating to the misuse of fireworks; what consultations her Department has undertaken on firework safety in the last 12 months; what action she proposes to take to regulate the *(a)* sale and *(b)* use of fireworks; and if she will make a statement. [1441]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: My Department has received several hundred complaints from the public about the misuse of fireworks and I propose shortly to consult interested organisations on draft regulations to introduce additional restrictions on the types of fireworks which should be sold to the public, including some types of fireworks which feature in complaints of misuse.

British Airways and American Airlines

Sir George Young: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the proposed alliance of British Airways and American Airlines, following her meeting with Commissioner van Miert. [1505]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade met Commissioner van Miert on Tuesday 20 May for a preliminary discussion of the proposed alliance between British Airways and American Airlines, and other competition matters. It is not the President of the Board of Trade's policy to make public statements about the merits of individual competition cases in which she will be responsible for making decisions.

Bus Mergers

Mr. Canavan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement about the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's report on the merger between FirstBus and SB Holdings and the implications for Midland Bluebird. [1153]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The MMC's report on the acquisition by FirstBus plc of SB Holdings Ltd. (SBH) was published in January 1997. In line with the MMC's recommendations, the then Minister for Corporate and Consumer Affairs, Mr. John Taylor, asked the Director General of Fair Trading (DGFT) to seek undertakings from FirstBus to divest the

business of its subsidiary Midland Bluebird, plus part of the Glasgow operations of SBH. In the event that FirstBus has not identified a firm buyer that has been approved by the Secretary of State by 24 October 1997, the undertakings which are being sought will provide for the divestment of SBH in its entirety without divestment of any of Midland Bluebird's operations. The DGFT will advise my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on the outcome of his discussions with FirstBus in due course.

Small Firms (Definition)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what definition he will use to describe small firms, in terms of number of employees and turnover, when he introduces the fair payment of commercial debts bill; and if he will make a statement. [1277]

Mrs. Roche: We will consult on the details of the Fair Payment of Commercial Debts Bill in the summer. We will ask businesses, their representative organisations and other interested bodies for their views about the extent and application of the legislation for a Statutory Right to Interest.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the number and percentage of deduction from earnings orders in force to recover arrears of maintenance assessments carried out by the Child Support Agency on absent parents *(a)* in total and *(b)* by regional office for each year since the establishment of the agency. [1355]

Mr. Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 2 June 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about deduction from earnings orders (DEOs) issued by the Child Support Agency.

I should first of all point out that although DEOs are mainly used as a collection method where the AP has not co-operated, they may be used as a preferred payment method by absent parents and are not solely used for collection of arrears payments.

It is not possible to provide the regional breakdown you requested. However information has been collected on the number of DEOs issued since April 1993. The attached table shows the number of DEOs issued and how they compare with the Agency's live load.

I hope this is helpful.

Period	*DEOs issued*	*Live and assessed caseload*
1993–94	2,600	180,000
1994–95	32,027	368,000
1995–96	52,931	462,000
1996–97	57,898	579,000

All live and assessed figures are for year end with the exception of the 1996–97 figure which is February 1997 data from Analytical Services Division Quarterly Summary of Statistics. This is the most recent data available.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time taken by the CSA to complete an assessment review; and what action she intends to take to reduce this time. [1360]

Mr. Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 2 June 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency assessment reviews.

The first part of your question asks about the average time taken to complete in assessment review. Under Child Support Agency legislation, there are a number of different reviews that can be requested by parties to an assessment. (which will include the absent parent, parent/person with care and child in Scotland). Any of the interested parties can ask for a review of their assessment by another child support officer if they disagree with the decision of the original child support officer. This is referred to as a second tier review. They may also request a change of circumstance review if a change has occurred that may affect their maintenance assessment. In addition, the Agency undertakes a periodic review of each case every two years.

The Agency measures the number of individual reviews cleared within each of the time bands specified in Agency targets. The Agency does not measures average processing times for cases either within the time bands, or overall.

The 1996–97 target for second tier reviews were;

55% of second tier reviews to be cleared within 13 weeks;

80% of second tier reviews to be cleared within 26 weeks;

and no more than 15% to be older than 26 weeks as at 31 March 1997.

The Agency met all elements of this target and performance was as follows;

66% of second tier reviews cleared within 13 weeks;

88% of second tier reviews to be cleared within 26 weeks;

and 10% that were older than 26 weeks as at 31 March 1997.

The 1996–97 target for change of circumstances were;

Of those change of circumstances cleared

–50% to be cleared within 13 weeks

–60% to be cleared within 26 weeks

Again the Agency met both elements of this target as follows;

Of those change of circumstances cleared

–63% were cleared within 13 weeks

–78% were cleared within 26 weeks.

Even though these targets were exceeded last year, this does not mean that we are complacent in these areas. We will be seeking to ensure that this years performance improves further.

I hope this is helpful.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the average length of time taken by the Child Support Agency to complete a maintenance assessment *(a)* in total and *(b)* by regional office for each year since the establishment of the agency. [1357]

Mr. Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 2 June 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance assessments.

The Agency does not collect information on average processing times, however, the Agency does have a Secretary of State target to clear 60% of new maintenance applications within 26 weeks, which has been in place for the years 1995/96 and 1996/97.

In 1995/96, the Agency cleared 48% of new applications within 26 weeks; in 1996/97 the performance achieved was 54%. However in the last 2 months of 1996/97 the 60% target was exceeded overall A breakdown of the performance by Child Support Agency Centre is available for 1996/97 and is shown in the attached table.

The intake of child maintenance applications is forecast to increase by 5% this year. Nevertheless, we will maintain this target.

I hope this is helpful.

1996–97 performance by Child Support Agency Centre	*Percentage of applications cleared within 26 weeks*
Dudley	51
Hastings	49
Falkirk	53
Plymouth	53
Birkenhead	59
Belfast	55

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the number and percentage of Child Support Agency cases in which no moneys are being recovered from the absent parent *(a)* in total, *(b)* by regional office and *(c)* by gender of absent parent for each year since the establishment of the agency. [1356]

Mr. Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 2 June 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support cases where monies are not being recovered from absent parents (APs).

The information you have requested by region and for all years of Agency operation, is available only at disproportionate cost. I hope the following details will be helpful to you.

The attached table gives information on the current levels of compliance with maintenance assessments at Agency level. The data is taken from a 5% sample of live cases drawn from the child support computer system on the date shown. The Agency does not distinguish absent parents or parents with care by gender.

	Compliance		
February 1997	*Full compliance*	*Partial compliance*	*Nil compliance*
Full maintenance assessments			
Number of cases	52,200	52,100	61,000
Percentage	31.6	31.5	36.9
Interim maintenance assessments			
Number of cases (i)	600	4,000	51,700
Percentage	1.1	7.1	91.8
Number of cases AP paying direct to PWC	97,500	—	—

The above compliance table only includes cases where the Agency collection service is used, and the absent parent (AP) has a full maintenance assessment and payment is via the regular payment account.

Full compliance: All payments due to the regular maintenance accounts have been made and nothing is outstanding.

Partial compliance: Some payment(s) have been made to the regular maintenance accounts during the last 3 months and there is an amount outstanding.

Nil compliance: No payments have been made to the regular maintenance accounts during the last 3 months.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the number and percentage of maintenance assessments carried out by the Child Support Agency which are challenged by the absent parent *(a)* in total and *(b)* by regional office for each year since the establishment of the agency. [1354]

Mr. Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 2 June 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency maintenance assessments.

You have asked about the number of maintenance assessments that are challenged by the absent parent. The Agency records information on the number of applications for a second tier review (STR) received from any party to the assessment. Along with absent parents this includes parents with care, persons (other than parents) with care, and a child in Scotland. The STR is the means by which any of the interested parties can ask for a review of their assessment by another child support officer (CSO) if they disagree with the decision of the original CSO.

The attached tables therefore give the number of STR requests received by the Agency since inception, set against the total number of maintenance assessments made in each year.

I hope this is helpful.

	1993–94
	Number
Total number of maintenance assessments	205,442
Total number of second tier reviews (STR) received	10,804

A breakdown of STRs received by each Child Support Agency Centre is not available for the first year of operation

Child support agency centre	*Second tier reviews received*
1994–95	
Dudley	4,161
Hastings	3,568
Falkirk	4,256
Plymouth	5,843
Birkenhead	5,231
Belfast	4,236
Agency total 1994–95	27,295
Agency total number of maintenance assessments	250,836
1995–96	
Dudley	5,231
Hastings	3,812
Falkirk	5,440
Plymouth	7,746
Birkenhead	6,356
Belfast	4,977
Agency total 1995–96	33,562
Agency total number of maintenance assessments	127,876
1996–97	
Dudley	5,646
Hastings	3,554
Falkirk	5,637
Plymouth	7,237
Birkenhead	6,825
Belfast	6,349
Agency total 1996–97	35,248
Agency total number of maintenance assessments	129,255

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the number and percentage of Child Support Agency cases in which an interim assessment exceeded the actual maintenance assessment *(a)* in total and *(b)* by regional office for each year since the establishment of the agency. [1358]

Mr. Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 2 June 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about Child Support Agency interim maintenance assessments (IMAs).

The Agency is unable to answer your question in the format requested, however set out below is an explanation of interim assessments together with the number we have imposed to date. I hope you find this helpful.

An IMA is usually imposed where the absent parent, parent with care or their respective partners do not provide all the information required under Child Support legislation to make a full maintenance assessment (FMA).

One of four different categories of IMA can be imposed depending on the nature of the missing information, ie category A, B, C or D IMA. Category A and D are intended to encourage compliance and will normally always be punitive and higher than the liability under a FMA. A category B may, or may not be punitive depending on the circumstances of the case, it generally will not take account of any new family. A category C IMA is non punitive and is imposed in self employed cases to allow the AP extra time to provide the necessary financial evidence.

Since April 1993 the Agency has imposed over 166,000 IMAs. I do not have break down by category, but the majority of IMAs will be category A where the liability is normally higher than the FMA.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Hotels (Value Added Tax)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the current relevant levels of VAT levied by hotels in each of the European Union countries in respect of *(a)* accommodation and *(b)* food purchase. [1363]

Dawn Primarolo: The VAT rates applied in European Union countries to hotel accommodation and meals are shown in the table.

VAT on hotel accommodation and meals in the EU

Percentage

Country	*Hotel accommodation*	*Hotel meals*
Austria	10	20
Belgium	6	21
Denmark	25	25
Finland	6	22
France	5.5	20.6
Germany	15	15
Greece	8	8
Ireland	12.5	12.5
Italy[1]	10	10
Luxembourg	15	15
Netherlands	6	17.5
Portugal[2]	5	12
Spain	7	7
Sweden	12	12
UK[3]	17.5	17.5

[1] The standard rate of 19 per cent. applies in both instances to luxury hotels.

[2] A rate of 4 per cent. applies for hotel accommodation and 10 per cent. for hotel meas in Madeira and the Azores Archipelagoes.

[3] A rate of 5 per cent. applies to hotel accommodation in the Isle of Man.

Customs and Excise (Merger)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the findings of his review on the feasibility of merging Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue. [1855]

Dawn Primarolo: A programme of closer working (but not merger) between Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue resulted from a review under their Fundamental Expenditure Reviews in 1994 of the boundary between the two departments. We intend to develop further this programme in support of Government objectives.

Interest Rate

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list which of the economic indicators for which his Department receives data he will take into account when assessing interest rate policy. [1872]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Chancellor has transferred the operational responsibility for setting interest rates to the Bank of England.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer at present levels of economic activity, at what amount interest rates would have to be set to achieve levels of inflation of *(a)* 2.4 per cent., *(b)* 2.3 per cent., *(c)* 2.2 per cent., *(d)* 2.1 per cent. and *(e)* 2.0 per cent. by the end of March 1998. [1871]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The mechanisms by which interest rates affect the inflation rate are quantitatively uncertain and may be influenced by unforeseen events reflecting the time lags involved. Therefore it is not possible to be sure about the precise level of interest rates required to hit an exact inflation rate ten months ahead.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 20 May, *Official Report*, column *508*, what are his growth objectives for the British economy for its financial years 1997–98, 1998–99, and 1999–00; and if he will state his employment objectives, *(a)* numerically and *(b)* descriptivity, for the same financial years. [1864]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Government's central economic objectives are high and stable levels of growth and employment. The Government do not intend to set numerical targets for growth and employment.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 20 May, *Official Report*, column 508, what are the numerical targets of the Government's economic policy for the key indicators to monitor. [1863]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Chancellor will set out the Government's approach to monetary policy in his Mansion House speech on 12 June. The Government regard price stability as an essential pre-condition for high and stable levels of growth and employment. Sound public finances are also important for lasting economic stability. The Government's fiscal policy will be spelt out in the Budget.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what means he proposes to resolve any incompatibility between the Bank of England's monetary policy objective of price stability and the Government's growth and employment objectives. [1865]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The monetary policy objective of the Bank of England will be to deliver price stability (as defined by the Government's inflation target) and, without prejudice to this objective, to support the Government's economic policy, including their objectives for growth and employment. Price stability is the best way that monetary policy can contribute to achieving high and stable levels of growth and employment in the long run.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 20 May, *Official Report*, column 509, what is his definition of *(a)* extreme economic circumstances and *(b)* a limited period; and if he will make a statement covering both the numerical and descriptive aspects of these matters. [1869]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* Further details will be made available when the draft Bill is introduced into the House.

Departmental Advisers

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many advisers employed in his office during his time in opposition are now working with him in the Treasury; what are their names; how old they are; what the terms and conditions are upon which they are now employed; how much salary they are each being paid; if that money is coming from public or private sources; and if he will publish a detailed curriculum vitae for each of the individuals concerned. [1732]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Prime Minister has approved the appointment of Ed Balls, Charles Whelan, Edward Miliband and Andrew Maugham as paid Special Advisers to HM Treasury.

The terms and conditions for Special Advisers paid from public funds were agreed by the Prime Minister on 19 May in the attachment to his letter to Cabinet colleagues. A copy is being placed in the Library of the House. No salaries for those employed in the Treasury have yet been agreed.

It would not be appropriate for me to publish personal information about the individuals concerned, or to comment on their previous private employment arrangements.

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the names of the political and special advisers appointed to his Department since the general election. [1626]

Mrs. Liddell: The Prime Minister has approved the appointment of Ed Balls, Charles Whelan, Edward Miliband and Andrew Maugham as paid Special Advisers to HM Treasury.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many young people under the age of 25 years have been unemployed for over six months in *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* England, *(c)* Manchester, *(d)* Trafford and *(e)* Wythenshawe and Sale East. [1643]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Goggins, dated 3 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to reply to your recent question asking how many young people under the age of 25 years have been unemployed for over six months in (a) Great Britain, (b) England, (c) Manchester, (d) Trafford and (e) Wythenshawe and Sale East.

The ONS produces two measures of unemployment. The first, derived from the quarterly Labour Force Survey, is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and counts as unemployed, people who are: a) without a paid job; b) available to start work within the next two weeks and c) have either looked for work in the past four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained.

ONS also publishes the monthly claimant count, which is based on the UK administrative system and includes all people claiming unemployment-related benefits at Employment Service offices on the day of the monthly count, who on that day had signed on as

unemployed and available to do any suitable work. All people who attend an Employment Service office to sign are counted, irrespective of whether they are actually *receiving* benefit.

Both measures are described and compared in the ONS booklet *How exactly is Unemployment Measured*. Please find a copy enclosed with this reply.

Information on length of time ILO unemployed is generally available from the Labour Force Survey, a quarterly basis down to county, or former county, level. The most recent information available is for autumn 1996. Some information for local authorities is available from the annual LFS Local Area Database (LAD). However, in order to protect confidentiality the database only includes key data items and length of time unemployed is not among them. If it were available the figure for Trafford would be less than the threshold for reliable estimates. No figures less than this threshold can be released. Further information on the Local Area Database is available in the May 1996 edition of *Labour Market Trends* (pages 239–246) which is available in the House of Commons library. No information about parliamentary constituencies is available from the LFS. The latest available figures are shown in the table below:

	Unadjusted claimant unemployment[1]	*ILO unemployed*[2]
Great Britain	171,572	246,000
England	145,266	211,000
Greater Manchester county	8,089	13,000
Trafford LAD[3]	413	n/a
Wythenshawe and Sale East PCA[4]	426	n/a

Notes:
[1] By duration of six months or more, April 1997.
[2] For at least six months (unadjusted, autumn 1996 LFS).
[3] Local authority district.
[4] Parliamentary constituency area.
Source:
ONS.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to revise the method of calculating the unemployment statistics. [1092]

Mrs. Liddell: The Director of the Office for National Statistics is responsible for deciding the form, coverage and timing of release of statistics issued by his Office, taking into account the views of customers. ONS is presently consulting customers on the future presentation of labour market statistics; the consultation exercise was launched through an article in the Labour Market Trends published on 8 May. Comments on the proposals should be sent to ONS by 14 June.

The proposals set out for consultation reflect the House of Commons Employment Select Committee recommendation that more prominence should be given to the measure of unemployment which is based on the internationally agreed ILO definition.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people aged 18 to 24 years who had been unemployed for more than six months found jobs in each of the past five years; how many people in that age group became unemployed for more than six months in each of the past five years; and how many such people on average were unemployed for more than six months in each of the past five years, [1631]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. David Willetts, dated 3 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on unemployment of those aged 18 to 24 years.

Please note that information on the destination of leavers from the claimant count is only available since January 1995, therefore this information has only been provided for the last two years. Also, this information only includes those claims that were terminated with a known destination. Approximately 25 per cent. of all terminated claims have an unknown destination.

The results are shown in the attached tables.

Number of people aged 18–24 years who had been claimant unemployed for more than six months, who left because they had found work, 1995–96, Great Britain

Year	*Number of people (thousands)*
1995	163.5
1996	152.2

Source:
JUVOS leaving marker file.

Number of people aged 18–24 years crossing the six month duration threshold, 1992–96, Great Britain

Year	*Number of people (thousands)*
1992	479.8
1993	472.8
1994	402.1
1995	362.6
1996	327.4

Source:
JUVOS Cohort (April 1997).

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many persons aged 18 to 24 years are currently seeking and available for work; [1649]

(2) how many persons aged 18 to 24 years who are currently registered unemployed have never been employed; [1651]

(3) how many persons aged 18 to 24 years are currently registered unemployed; [1647]

(4) how many persons aged 18 to 24 years who are seeking work are also undertaking part or full-time study. [1650]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. James Paice, dated 3 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your four recent questions (1647, 1649, 1650 and 1651) about 18 to 24 year olds in the labour market asking how many are: (1) registered unemployed, (2) currently seeking and available for work, (3) registered unemployed who have never been employed (4) seeking work and also undertaking part or full-time study.

The ONS produces two measures of unemployment. The first, derived from the quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS), is defined on an internationally-recognised consistent basis set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and counts as unemployed people who are:

(a) without a paid job;

(b) available to start work within the next two weeks and

(c) have either looked for work in the past four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained.

ONS also publishes the monthly claimant count, which is based on the UK administrative system and includes all people claiming unemployed-related benefits at Employment Service offices on the day of the monthly count, who on that day had signed on as unemployed and available to do any suitable work. All people who attend an Employment Service office to sign are counted, irrespective of whether they are actually *receiving* unemployment-related benefits.

Both measures are described and compared in the ONS booklet *How Exactly is Unemployment Measured?*, a copy of which is enclosed with this reply. This booklet is also available in the House of Commons Library.

A total of 421,656 18 to 24 year olds were registered unemployed (claimant unemployed) in the UK in April 1997. This compares with an estimate of 551,000 18-24 year olds ILO unemployed according to the autumn 1996 Labour Force Survey. The group you refer to in your first question "currently seeking and available for work" is broadly the same as the ILO definition of unemployment except that this also includes those who are waiting to start a job they have already obtained.

No information is available from the claimant count about those registered unemployed who have never been employed. According to the autumn 1996 Labour Force Survey there were an estimated 179,000 18-24 year olds who were ILO unemployed and had never had a paid job. 38,000 of these were in full-time education and therefore not eligible to claim unemployment related benefits.

An estimated total of 127,000 18-24 year olds not in employment had been seeking work within the past four weeks and undertaking full or part-time study according to the autumn 1996 UK LFS. Of these 95,000 were ILO unemployed (ie seeking and available to start work within the next two weeks or waiting to start a job already obtained). The rest are categorised as economically inactive because they were not available to start work within two weeks. 79,000 out of the above total of 127,000 said that they were looking for part-time work. It may be assumed that many of these would be planning to combine their studies with part-time work, although they cannot be separately identified.

Advanced Corporation Tax

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for meetings with representatives of the Association of Consulting Actuaries about the impact of any changes in advanced corporation tax on pension funds and charities; and if he will make a statement. [1561]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* I have no plans to meet representatives of the Association of Consulting Actuaries.

Bank of England

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the reasons for transferring departmental management from the Bank of England to the Treasury; and if he will make a statement illustrating the operational implications and benefits arising from this change. [1874]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Chancellor's statement granting the Bank of England operational responsibility for setting interest rates means that it is important to separate full policy responsibility for the Government's debt and cash management from monetary policy. The separation is intended to ensure that debt and cash management decisions are taken in such a way as to minimise the cost of financing the Government's borrowing needs subject to risk and are not influenced by short-term monetary policy considerations (and *vice versa*). The Treasury and the Bank are now engaged in working out the operational details of the transfer.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which other European Community Governments make use of advances from their central banks similar to the ways and means advances to Her Majesty's Government from the Bank of England. [1525]

Mrs. Liddell: No other Government of member states of the European Community operate an overdraft facility with their central bank similar to Ways and Means advances.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the manner in which ways and means advances from the Bank of England to the Government operate. [1531]

Mrs. Liddell: Government borrowing operations are conducted through the National Loans Fund. If the Fund is in surplus, the surplus is deposited with the Banking Department of the Bank of England. If the Fund is in deficit, the deficit is met by borrowing, known as ways and means borrowing, from the Bank's Issue Department. These arrangements enable any differences between the Fund's daily outgoings and its receipts to be offset without formality by changes in the deposit balance or ways and means borrowing.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors will be taken into account by the Court of the Bank of England when it reviews the performance of its Monetary Policy Committee; and if he will make a statement. [1867]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* In reviewing the performance of the MPC in meeting its monetary policy objective of price stability, the Court will have particular regard to whether the Bank is collecting proper regional and sectoral information. The Court itself is to be reformed to ensure that it is representative of the whole of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the voting decisions of each member of his new monetary policy committee when actions are taken to achieve the Government's inflation target. [1866]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Monetary Policy Committee meetings will be minuted, and the minutes, including a record of the votes, will be released no later than six weeks after the meeting.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to announce the name of the new Deputy Governor of the Bank of England. [1489]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I will make an announcement in due course.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he defines as short-term gain in terms of the length of time an asset has been held for the purposes of capital gains tax. [1851]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The capital gains tax system does not define short-term gains.

Single Currency

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to become a signatory to the stability pact as part of the preparation for a single currency. [300]

Mr. Gordon Brown: The principles and main elements of the stability and growth pact were agreed by Heads of State and Government at the European Council in Dublin last year. The informal Council of Finance Ministers at Noordjwijk in April gave political agreement to the texts, which have been sent to the European Parliament. The UK has maintained a Parliamentary scrutiny reserve on the stability pact proposals. The intention is that the European Council will endorse the stability pact texts at its meeting in Amsterdam on 16 June, including any amendments since the Noordjwijk ECOFIN, and taking account of the European Parliament's views.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1253]

Mrs. Liddell: My department has work in progress to identify and test its computer systems to ensure that they will operate correctly at the turn of the century. This work is currently within the model timetable set down by CCTA.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if domestic holidays are included under other recreations in the retail prices index; and if he will publish separate figures for the increase in the price of domestic holidays. [1444]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 3 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the inclusion of domestic holidays in the Retail Prices Index.

A price index for domestic holidays has been included in the Retail Prices Index since February 1994 under the published heading of United Kingdom holidays. This was on the recommendation of the 1992 Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee. These figures are given in Table 2 of the monthly *Business Monitor MM23—Retail Prices Index* a copy of which is in the House of Commons library.

2001 Census

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy that the 2001 Census includes questions relating to levels of income, poverty and wealth. [1543]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mrs. Ann Clwyd, dated 2 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply, as Director of the Office for National Statistics, to your recent Parliamentary question concerning questions about levels of income, poverty and wealth in the 2001 Census.

The Census Offices have been consulting users about the need for questions in the 2001 Census, and a number of new questions are being trialled in the 1997 Census Test which will be held in June. The Test questionnaire includes questions which would provide statistics related to poverty and wealth. In particular, the Test will include a question about banded individual gross income.

The Government will publish their proposals for questions to be included in the Census in a White Paper in mid-1998. These proposals will be based on users' substantial requirements for information, and on evidence gathered in the 1997 Census Test on the public's reaction to the possible questions. The White Paper will invite comment.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what policy objectives underlie the Government's purpose in raising nominal and real exchange rates; and if he will estimate by how much the public sector borrowing requirement increased as a result of the increase in nominal and real exchange rates since 1995. [1528]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government do not have a policy of raising nominal or real exchange rates. The Government want a stable and competitive pound over the medium term, consistent with their objective of price stability. It is impossible to estimate the effects on the PSBR of the exchange rate appreciation since 1995, which will depend on the extent to which a higher exchange rate has affected the level and composition of gross domestic product.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effect of rises in exchange rates on output and employment in *(a)* manufacturing industry and *(b)* the rest of the economy since 1994. [1558]

Mrs. Liddell: There are many factors, in addition to changes in the exchange rate, which can affect output and employment in manufacturing industry and the rest of the economy; and it is difficult to isolate their separate effects. However, the Government are aware that the recent appreciation of sterling is making life difficult for manufacturing industry.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the trade-weighted change in the value of (i) sterling, (ii) the dollar, (iii) the D-mark and (iv) the yen since 1985; and if he will indicate to the latest available date the corresponding changes in *(a)* the unit cost of labour, *(b)* producer prices and *(c)* consumer prices. [1564]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 3 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the change in the value of Sterling, the US Dollar, the Deutschemark and the Japanese Yen since 1985; and also about Unit Labour Costs, Producer Prices and Retail Prices.

The information you have requested about exchange rates is published by the Bank of England in Table 26 of their publication *Bank of England: Monetary and Financial Statistics*. More historic data can be obtained from the publication *Bank of England: Statistical Abstract*.

The information you have requested about Unit Labour Costs is published by the ONS in table 4.1 of *Economic Trends*. More historic data can be obtained from the Annual Supplement to Economic Trends.

Producer Prices are also published by the ONS—in table 3.1 of *Economic Trends*. More historic data can be obtained from the same Annual Supplement referred to above. Information on Retail Prices going back to 1985 is available from table 11 of the ONS *Business Monitor MM23—Retail Prices Index*.

Copies of all these publications are available in the House of Commons Library.

The data published by the ONS is also available from the ONS Database. This can be accessed via the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment has been made of the effect of the appreciation in the nominal value of the pound between the fourth quarter of 1994 and the second quarter of 1997 on the rate of inflation, manufacturing output and employment. [1550]

Mrs. Liddell: There are many factors, in addition to changes in the nominal value of sterling, which can affect the rate of inflation, manufacturing output and employment; and it is difficult to isolate the separate effects. However, the Government are aware that the recent appreciation of sterling is making life difficult for manufacturing industry.

Audio-visual Goods (Prices)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by what percentage the retail price of audio-visual goods has fallen since January 1987; and what has been the market share of British industry in the supply of such goods in the United Kingdom. [1557]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 3 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent questions on the fall in the retail price of audio-visual goods since January 1987 and the market share of British industry for such goods in the United Kingdom.

The fall in the retail price of audio-visual equipment since January 1987 can be calculated from the ONS database which may be accessed by the House of Commons library.

The market share of British industry in the supply of audio-visual equipment in the United Kingdom is shown in the table below:

Year	*Percentage of British market share*
1990	30
1991	15
1992	10
1993	20
1994	21
1995	[1]15

[1] Provisional.

Property Costs

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much *(a)* house prices and *(b)* the cost of dwelling insurance and ground rent, as measured by the retail prices index, have risen since January 1992; and if he will provide separate figures for dwelling insurance and ground rent. [1529]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 3 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how much (a) house prices and (b) the cost of dwelling insurance and ground rent, as measured by the retail price index, have risen since January 1992; and if separate figures for dwelling insurance and ground rent will be provided.

House prices are not published in the retail price index and are obtainable from the Department of the Environment.

Between January 1992 and April 1997 the cost of dwelling insurance and ground rent as measured by the retail price index has fallen by 2.5 per cent. Separate information for the specified categories is not published.

There are no plans to provide separate figures for dwelling insurance and ground rent.

Manufactures

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list on the basis of July to December 1973 = 100, the United Kingdom terms of trade for finished manufactures together with *(a)* the volume of imports and exports of finished manufactures and *(b)* the surplus/deficit on trade in manufactures at 1992 prices. [1539]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 3 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question concerning UK trade in manufactured goods.

The information is not available at 1973 or 1992 prices. However, volumes and information from which terms of trade may be calculated are available, using 1990 as the base year, from the ONS database which may be accessed by the House of Commons Library. Balances of trade in manufactures at current prices are available from the same source.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss matters relating to BCCI. [1488]

Mrs. Liddell: The Governor and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor meet from time to time to discuss a range of matters.

Air Passenger Duty

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to expand the number of domestic air services to islands in Scotland exempt from air passenger duty. [1285]

Dawn Primarolo: Decisions on the types of aircraft used for flights to the Scottish islands which affect whether air passenger duty is charged, are purely commercial decisions for the airline operators.

Social Model (Disability)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1685]

Mrs. Liddell: Our manifesto commits us to establishing "comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or work, developed in partnership with all interested parties". The Government will be consulting widely and developing proposals in partnership with disability organisations, employers, employers organisations, trade unions and others. It is not appropriate for me to pre-empt the outcome of that consultation.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

Global Warming

10. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has evaluated into the rise in global temperatures in the current year relative to the 1951 to 1980 average. [453]

Mr. Meacher: Monitoring by the Hadley Centre, supported by my Department, shows that in the first three months of 1997, global surface temperatures were 0.4 degrees Celsius above the 1951 to 1980 average.

Regional Development Agencies

11. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he proposes to publish proposals to set up English regional development agencies. [454]

Mr. Caborn: We plan to bring forward legislation in the Autumn.

Departmental Responsibilities (Scotland)

12. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what responsibilities he has in Scotland. [455]

Mr. Prescott: My responsibilities are in the main for England. However, I do have a number of responsibilities in Scotland, particularly for transport matters. I have placed further details in the Library of the House.

Pollution

13. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what actions he plans to take to reduce pollution from low-level ozone. [458]

Mr. Meacher: Ground-level ozone is a serious air pollutant and the Government are committed to eliminating episodes which may damage people's health. The control of ozone levels requires international action and the Government are playing a full and active part in developing ozone reduction strategies in Europe.

Environmental Improvements (West Cumbria)

14. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for schemes of environmental improvement in West Cumbria. [459]

Ms Angela Eagle: Environmental improvements are an important feature in all initiatives supported by the Departments of the Environment and Transport.

Area Cost Adjustment

15. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend the area cost adjustment element of the local government SSA formula. [460]

Ms Armstrong: We have commissioned research on the area cost adjustment in consultation with the Local Government Association.

Oxfordshire County Council

17. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the request by Oxfordshire county council to be designated to operate at a level above cap. [462]

Mr. Raynsford: Oxfordshire County Council was designated for capping on 22 May. The proposed cap requires the authority to reduce its budget requirement by £6 million.

Housing (Chester)

18. **Ms Christine Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what impact the Government's proposals to phase release of capital receipts will have on the availability of affordable housing units in City of Chester. [463]

Ms Armstrong: We will ensure that resources released under the Capital Receipts Initiative are made available to local authorities to use in support of priority schemes which meet key objectives. We will be considering and consulting on objectives and the distribution of additional

spending over the coming weeks. It will be for local authorities to decide how to use any resources within the general objectives set.

Water Disconnections

19. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy towards water disconnections to domestic properties. [464]

Mr. Prescott: At the "Water Summit" on 19 May, we announced the Government's intention to review the system of charging for water. That review will include the water companies' debt recovery arrangements, including disconnection.

Derelict Land

20. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will establish a central register of derelict land. [465]

Ms Angela Eagle: A survey of derelict land in England was carried out in 1993 and published in 1995. My Department is currently exploring the possibility of establishing a national land use information system, which would include information on derelict land.

Poverty

21. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to reduce poverty in the English regions. [466]

Mr. Caborn: Reducing poverty across the nation is one of the Government's key policy objectives. Our policies for the regions are aimed at tackling the root causes of deprivation and promoting economic growth. New regional development agencies will provide the means of securing effective, properly co-ordinated action at the regional and sub-regional level, to underpin our wider economic and social agenda.

Air Pollution

22. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he proposes to take to reduce air pollution from the burning of fossil fuels. [467]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are committed to tackling global warming, acid rain and ambient air pollution by reducing emissions from the burning of fossils fuels. We are examining options for policies and measurers, their costs and other consequences, which will enable us to meet our challenging manifesto commitment to reduce carbon dioxide emissions to 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. Strategies to achieve these goals will include the development of an integrated transport system, and the promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

In this context the Government are considering carefully the proposals in the European Commission's draft Acidification strategy for strict new targets for emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and ammonia and those in the proposed Auto Oil Directives for proposed fuel and vehicle standards.

Housebuilding

23. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to expand housebuilding. [468]

Ms Armstrong: The Government's Capital Receipts initiative will support the priority schemes of local authorities which meet key objectives. It will be for local authorities to decide how to use any resources within the general objectives set.

Capital Receipts

24. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy in respect of the control of the capital receipts by debt-free local authorities. [469]

Mr. Raynsford: Debt-free local authorities have the freedom to reinvest capital receipts from the sale of their assets, according to their own priorities.

Opencast Mining

25. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to carry out a review of MPG3; and what plans he has to enhance the role of local communities in the granting of permission for opencasting. [470]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the response I gave in an Adjournment Debate on this issue on Monday 19 May, *Official Report*, columns 483-88. I have asked my officials to prepare urgently a plan of action to review the present stance of MPG3 on opencast coal.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the oral statement by the Minister of state on 19 May, *Official Report*, column 488, if he will set out the timetable for the departmental plan of action relating to opencast coal mining; and how he plans to deal with planning appeals currently outstanding. [1211]

Mr. Raynsford: My officials are currently preparing a plan of action as a matter of urgency. Any outstanding appeals will be determined in accordance with the development plan for the area unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Household Waste

26. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will undertake discussions with Lancashire county council about proposals to tip household waste in Round "O" Quarry, West Lancashire. [471]

Mr. Meacher: It would not be appropriate for me to discuss the plans for Round "O" Quarry with Lancashire County Council at this stage. Proposals relating to the quarry are contained within the draft Lancashire Minerals and Waste Local Plan, which will be the subject of a public inquiry next year. The inquiry will provide objectors and supporters with an opportunity to put their views to the Inspector.

Household Growth

27. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on trends in household growth. [472]

Mr. Raynsford: The latest household projections for England were published in March 1995. The projections showed an increase of 4.4 million households from 1991 to 2016. Since these projections were published they have been subjected to considerable public scrutiny and are generally regarded as the best assessment that can be made with the currently available information. We are currently considering the responses to last November's Green Paper on the implications of the latest figures.

London Government

28. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the timetable for the introduction of a strategic authority and mayor in London. [473]

Mr. Prescott: Subject to a referendum and the necessary legislation being enacted by Parliament, I expect that the new mayor and authority will be elected in May 2000.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to set up, support and fund an all party organisation to campaign in favour of a yes vote in respect of a referendum on proposals to set up a strategic authority for London; and if he will make a statement. [1498]

Mr. Raynsford: None. We are intending to issue a consultations paper on the establishment of a directly elected mayor and strategic authority in London by the end of July. We will subsequently introduce legislation to make provision for a referendum in London on this matter and subject to parliamentary approval it is our intention to hold the referendum in May 1998.

Departmental Appointments

Mr. Heseltine: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many appointments to his Department he has approved since 2 May; and if he will list them, setting out their responsibilities and stating their remuneration. [1091]

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the number of political appointments made in the departments for which he is accountable. [1502]

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the names of the political and special advisers who have been appointed to his Department since the General Election. [1745]

Mr. Prescott: With the Prime Minister's approval, we have appointed 2 Special Advisers, Joe Irvin acts as my Special Adviser and Kate Davies acts as Special Adviser to the Minister for Transport.

Salaries for the Special Advisers are being negotiated individually in relation to their previous earnings, within a pay range which is presently £24,349 rising to £73,484. Progression up the range will be entirely performance related. Pension contributions are also paid in addition to salary.

David Taylor, who is on temporary leave of absence from Lancashire Enterprises plc, is acting as an unpaid Special Adviser for a limited period.

Housing Stock Transfers

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to issue advice to local authorities that are in the process of considering the large scale voluntary transfer of their housing stock, pending the Government's review of the law; and if he will make a statement; [1270]

(2) what plans he has to review the law regarding the large scale voluntary transfer of housing stock; and if he will make a statement. [1271]

Mr. Raynsford: We are reviewing the policy on housing stock transfers. We are aiming to issue revised procedural guidance for housing transfers in the near future. My officials provide advice and guidance on housing transfers through their regular contact with local authorities.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1250]

Mr. Prescott: DOE, DOT and their Executive Agencies have projects underway to tackle the problem. Both departments are undertaking system audits and holding discussions with product and service providers to analyse the problem in detail in order to produce costed plans by October 1997. The audits of many major systems are complete and some corrective work has been done. In some cases systems are being replaced with compliant ones before 2000.

Household Projections

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department's housing statistics division will have prepared household projections for 1996 and 1997 for local authority areas in Tyne and Wear on the same basis as the OPCS household projections; and if he will publish both sets of figures. [1330]

Mr. Raynsford: OPCS (now the Office for National Statistics) does not produce household estimates and projections which are the responsibility of my Department. These estimates and projections are, however, based, inter alia, on Office for National Statistics population estimates and projections. The latest household projections for mid-1996 for the five metropolitan districts of Tyne and Wear were published in March 1995 in "Projections of Households in England to 2016", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. These were compiled from the OPCS 1992-based sub-national population projections. Household projections were not produced for 1997. Planning has started for the next set of household projections, which

will be based on 1996 sub-national population projections that the Office for National Statistics expects to complete in late 1998. The associated 1996-based household projections should be available a few months afterwards.

The Department also produces annual estimates of the number of households by local authority area. The latest estimates are for 1995 and the details for the Tyne and Wear area are as follows:

	Number
Gateshead	86,000
Newcastle upon Tyne	121,000
North Tyneside	84,000
South Tyneside	66,000
Sunderland	120,000

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to receive the results of the research and reviews of the robustness of future household projections; and if he intends to make those results available to the House. [1342]

Mr. Raynsford: The most recent household projections have been subject to considerable public scrutiny since their publication in March 1995, in particular by the Environment Select Committee in evidence for its report on Housing Need in 1996. Whilst generally endorsing the projections, the Committee recommended that the Department continues to examine the extent to which household formation is affected by economic and social factors. This is currently being addressed by the Department of Applied Economics, Cambridge University, as part of a wider research project for the Department on the modelling of the need for social housing. The project has been extended beyond its original completion date and should now be finalised by the Autumn.

Last year, the Department also commissioned Heriot-Watt University to undertake a detailed literature review on household formation, with particular emphasis on evaluating the available evidence on the extent to which economic factors affect the propensity for new households to form. This work has recently been completed, and I expect to see the results shortly.

As is the usual practice with external research commissioned by the Department, I would expect reports to be published as soon as practicable.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has evaluated into the impact of international passenger survey statistics, and large student populations, on household projections; and what conclusions he has reached. [1340]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department has undertaken no research as such on the impact of the International Passenger Survey statistics on the household projections. Projections of the future pattern of migration between England and the rest of the world are the responsibility of the Government Actuary's Department (GAD). In collaboration with other departments, GAD undertook a thorough review in 1992 of the methods used to set international migration assumptions. This led to a new methodology which was used for the first time in the preparation of the 1991-based national population projections. As with previous projections, the assumed level of migration over the projection period takes into account information from a run of previous years in order to even out the fluctuations from year to year. The robustness of sources of information on migration, including the International Passenger Survey, is kept under regular review by the Office for National Statistics.

We are currently investigating the effects of large student populations on the household projections. However, any proposals for revisions to the methodology for handling students in the underlying sub-national population projections will need to be discussed with the Office for National Statistics before they can be implemented.

Departmental Merger

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what savings he will make by merging the Department of Transport and the Department of Environment. [1501]

Mr. Prescott: I have been appointed Secretary of State to the two Departments. My priority is to realise the opportunities which will arise in areas of overlapping responsibilities. If organisational changes are necessary to maximise these benefits I will consider them, but they are not my starting point.

Government Offices

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to alter the structure of the Government Offices for the regions. [1813]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friends the President of the Board of Trade and the Secretary of State for Education and Employment share with this Department responsibility for the Government Offices in the English regions. The network of Offices has an important part to play in advancing and implementing our policies, and we have no plans to change its structure.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review SSAs. [456]

Ms Armstrong: We are reviewing SSAs in consultation with the Local Government Association.

TRANSPORT

Gospel Oak to Barking Line

39. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on service levels on the Gospel Oak to Barking line. [485]

Dr. Strang: Key services for the Gospel Oak to Barking line have been specified in the passenger service requirement for North London Railways, the operator of services on the branch.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations he has received regarding services on the Gospel Oak to Barking Line. [482]

Dr. Strang: I have received no representations regarding these services.

A34

40. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will assess the advantages of resurfacing of the A34 between Wendlebury and Peartree roundabout. [486]

Dr. Strang: I am advised that the surface of the A34 between Wendlebury and Peartree roundabout remains in good condition.

Leeds Supertram

41. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if his Department will review the contribution from public funds towards the Leeds supertram scheme. [487]

Mr. Prescott: I shall consider carefully any application West Yorkshire passenger transport authority makes for support for funding for Leeds supertram.

Manchester Airport

42. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the expansion of Manchester airport. [488]

Mr. Prescott: The Government believe that the expansion of regional airports such as Manchester can make an important contribution to regional development and employment, but the environmental impact of particular proposals must be carefully weighed against their benefits.

Cycling

43. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to encourage cycling in urban areas. [489]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We will support the objectives of the National Cycling Strategy and the aim of a fourfold increase in cycling by 2012, as part of an integrated transport policy.

We shall be encouraging local authorities and others to improve conditions for cycling, particularly on urban roads. This will be done through the publication of information on good practice and through dialogue with the providers. We intend to play a full part in the National Cycling Forum, which has been set up to co-ordinate delivery of the strategy.

London Underground

44. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he plans to encourage greater private sector investment in London Underground. [490]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are developing a new public/private partnership to improve the London Underground, safeguard its commitment to the public interest and guarantee value for money to taxpayers and passengers. To this end my hon. Friend the Paymaster General is currently carrying out an urgent review of the Private Finance Initiative to see how it can be made to work better.

Rail Regulator

45. **Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for meeting the Rail Regulator to discuss penalties for non-delivery of services. [491]

50. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the powers of the Rail Regulator. [496]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have already met the Rail Regulator and made clear our view that the regulation of the rail industry, and the sanctions available to the regulator and the Franchising Director, need to be strengthened.

We are conducting a thorough review of rail regulation to identify exactly what improvements need to be made.

Transport Infrastructure Development

46. **Mr. Timms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are his priorities for transport infrastructure development within the Thames Gateway region. [492]

Mr. Prescott: Our manifesto for London "Because London Deserves Better", recognised the need for modern transport links to enhance accessibility, and support regeneration within the Thames Gateway; we are currently studying options and priorities.

London Transport Policy

47. **Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to visit Dalston Kingsland station to discuss a London transport policy. [493]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions nor I have arranged to visit Dalston Kingsland station to discuss a London transport policy, but I should be willing to consider such an invitation.

Extended Franchises

48. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to refuse the applications by Stagecoach and others for extended franchises. [494]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Franchising Director has no powers under the Railways Act 1993 to extend franchises unless provision was made for this in the original franchise agreement or he is directed by the Secretary of State. There is no such provision in the South West Trains franchise agreement, and there are no plans to direct the Franchising Director to extend this or any other franchise.

Rail Electrification

49. **Mr. Gareth Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for expediting electrification and improvement of the railway between Holyhead and London along the north Wales coast. [495]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government have no plans for the electrification of the Crewe to Holyhead line but Railtrack are also taking forward a strategy for improvements on the Crewe to Bangor section of the North Wales Coast line which will increase line speeds to 100 mph and are progressing the modernisation and upgrade of the West Coast Main Line, which the North Wales line links into at Crewe.

Roads Programme

51. **Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the roads programme. [497]

Dr. Strang: We intend to discharge our manifesto commitment to carry out a strategic review of the trunk roads programme.

A36

52. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for improving the A36 road through West Wellow. [498]

Dr. Strang: The second phase of a traffic calming scheme on the A36 at West Wellow will be completed this year. Design work for a third phase to provide a roundabout at Whinwhistle road is under way.

Channel Tunnel (Safety)

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what action the channel tunnel safety authority proposes to take against Eurotunnel following the publication of its investigation into the channel tunnel fire; [8]

(2) what action the channel tunnel safety authority proposes to take to ensure that Eurotunnel carry out the recommendations in the report into the channel tunnel fire; and what sanctions are available to the Authority in the event of Eurotunnel failing to carry out recommendations; [58]

(3) what time scale has been given by the channel tunnel safety authority to Eurotunnel for implementing each of the recommendations in its report into the channel tunnel fire. [57]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The channel tunnel safety authority made it clear in its report into the channel tunnel fire that it expected its recommendations to be taken into account at the highest level within Eurotunnel. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made the same point when he discussed the report with the company's Co-Chairmen. The majority of the recommendations were implemented before approval was given to the restart of HGV services and, as a pre-condition to that approval, the Intergovernmental Commission required Eurotunnel to provide a timetable, satisfactory to the safety authority, for the implementation of the remaining recommendations. The safety authority will continue to monitor implementation through the action of its specialist working groups, appointed safety inspectors and at its regular meetings with Eurotunnel.

The Intergovernmental Commission has wide supervisory functions under the Treaty of Canterbury to issue directions to Eurotunnel to comply with recommendations from the safety authority.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the extent to which Eurotunnel is fulfilling its safety obligations in relation to the operation of *(a)* the Shuttle and *(b)* Eurostar services. [6]

Ms Jackson: Eurotunnel are required to comply with national and international laws including those relating to safe operation. It is their responsibility to ensure compliance or they face possible prosecution by national authorities or action by the intergovernmental commission on behalf of both Governments.

Eurotunnel's organisation includes a health safety and quality directorate whose work includes internal audit to ensure compliance with safety regulations.

The Governments have also appointed the channel tunnel safety authority to advise and assist the intergovernmental commission on all matters affecting safety in the construction and operation of the fixed link.

The safety authority monitors Eurotunnel's shuttle operations and Eurostar services throughout the channel tunnel from detailed incidents reports and regular operational reports from Eurotunnel; from regular reports of inspections from safety authority appointed inspectors; from examination of detailed reports from its specialist working groups on investigations into incidents; from reports on the outcome of safety exercises; and through regular meetings with Eurotunnel.

Road Repairs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the regions if he will place in the Library a list of the roads his Department assesses to be most in need of repair. [1]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Highways Agency prepares an annual programme of capital maintenance works on sections of Trunk Roads, intended to be the most cost effective way of maintaining the Trunk Road network as a whole. At the moment, the Highways Agency plans major roads capital maintenance projects for 1997–98 ont eh following sections of roads:

M1: J25–J26
M5: J14–J15
M5/M6: Ray Hall interchange
M6: J14–J15
M23: J8–J9
M25: J23–24
M27: J8–J10
M42: J3–3A
M42: J7A–J8
M53: J9–J10
M62: J11–J12
A249: Westminster–Sheerness

This is in addition to capital maintenance carried out by DBFO operators. Comparable information for local roads is not available. These roads are the responsibility of local highway authorities.

A6(M) (Stockport)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the revised design for the A6 (M) route in the Stockport Metropolitan Borough area has been completed; and if he will make a statement. [1555]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We will shortly be taking forward a strategic review of the trunk road programme, and expect that this scheme will be included within that review. It is clear however that as a result of the continuing examination to which individual schemes are subjected that there is a need for modification of this particular scheme. The details of any such changes are still to be considered.

Vehicle Emissions

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the impact of reducing the sulphur content of petrol and diesel on vehicle emissions of pollutants. [1879]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department has not commissioned any research specifically aimed at determining the impact of the sulphur content of fuel on vehicle emissions since a number of studies have been carried out by a range of organisations that already enable assessments to be made. A comprehensive study was carried out by the European automotive and oil industries as an element of the Auto-Oil study undertaken by the European Commission. This has lead to proposals for tighter fuel quality and vehicle emissions standards to come into effect from the year 2000. The studies show that sulphur can have an adverse effect on vehicle pollutants arising primarily through its detrimental effect on catalyst efficiency. For petrol vehicles fitted with catalytic convertors reductions in CO, HC and NOx can be achieved when using reduced sulphur fuels. For diesel vehicles, reduced sulphur fuel can lead to a reduction in particulate emissions, but the effect is enhanced in vehicles fitted with catalysts by reducing sulphate formation within the catalyst.

Ferry Subsidies

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the subsidies currently provided by his Department to each of the United Kingdom's island communities in respect of their ferry services. [1769]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions does not currently provide subsidies for ferry services to island communities.

A359 to A303 (Sparkford)

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what priority his Department affords the proposed A359 to A303 slip road at Sparkford; and when he expects construction to begin. [1565]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The A359 to A303 westbound slip road and connection is to be progressed as a Regional improvement and part of the Highways Agency's Network Enhancement Programme. It will be subject to the normal statutory procedures, including a public inquiry if there are objections to the draft Orders.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 4 June 1997

HEALTH

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1671]

Mr. Boateng: Publications for those with special needs, including people who are sensorily impaired, are generally distributed through agencies that have regular contact with such people. The Department sends mail shot samples and bulk orders on demand to these specialist agencies.

This is backed up by distributions via public libraries, Citizen's Advice Bureaux and other advice centres, local authorities and patient waiting areas in family doctor surgeries and hospitals.

Where an advertising campaign is associated with the topic concerned, the special versions of a publication may be offered through press advertisements. The publications are also available via the Department's literature response lines.

The Department is in the process of building its own direct mail database which will allow precise targeting of agencies and individuals who will act as channels through which this kind of information can be passed to the end user.

The Department's Internet site is being used increasingly to publicise the existence of its publications, including those for people with special needs, and additional publicity routes, such as public information kiosks, are currently being investigated.

Examples of the types of publication available are given in the following list:

TITLE/TYPE OF PUBLICATION

Braille

Patient's Charter (also available in audio cassette version)

Practical Guide for Disabled People (HB6)

NHS Reforms and You (also available in Moon and audio cassette versions)

NHS Complaints—Listening, Asking, Improving

Maternity Services—Patient Charter

How to get the best from Maternity Services

While You Are Pregnant—Safe Eating

Audio cassette

Health of the Nation

How to get the best from Maternity Services

While you Are Pregnant—Safe Eating

Keep Well Keep Warm

Practical Guide for Disabled People (HB6)

NHS Complaints—Listening, Asking, Improving

Large print

Keep Warm Keep Well (also available in audio cassette version)

Practical Guide for Disabled People (HB6)

Health and Well-Being: A Guide for Older People

NHS Complaints—Listening, Asking, Improving

While You Are Pregnant—Safe Eating

General Osteopathic Council

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he took to comply with the consultation requirement of the Osteopaths Act 1993 in respect of the nomination of the General Osteopathic Council; [1836]

(2) for what reason principals and vice-principals of osteopathic training institutions are excluded from membership of the General Osteopathic Council; and when the decision was made to exclude them; [1837]

(3) if directors of companies engaged in the registration and training of osteopaths are excluded from membership of the General Osteopathic Council; and if he will make a statement. [1838]

Ms Jowell: The nominations exercise leading to the appointments of the Chairman and members of the first General Osteopathic Council was conducted by the previous administration.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Chairman of the General Osteopathic Council is a lay member; and if he will make a statement. [1776]

Ms Jowell: The Chairman of the General Osteopathic Council, Mr. Simon Fielding OBE, is one of the eight lay members of the Council. Under the transitional provisions of the Osteopaths Act 1993, a lay member of the initial Council is defined as 'a person not appearing to the Privy Council to be a practising osteopath'. Although originally qualified as an osteopath, Mr. Fielding has not been able to practise as an osteopath since September 1988, as a result of injuries sustained in a violent assault. Under the transitional provisions described above, he therefore qualified for appointment as lay member of the Council.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding the composition of the General Osteopathic Council. [1834]

Ms Jowell: We have received several letters of support from osteopathic organisations for the Chairman and members of the new General Osteopathic Council, and expressing appreciation of their work towards full implementation of the Osteopaths Act.

Mr. Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to make the General Osteopathic Council more representative of the profession. [1835]

Ms Jowell: The Osteopaths Act 1993 makes provision for 12 osteopathic members on the General Osteopathic Council. Arrangements to fill the current vacancy in the osteopathic membership of the Council will be commenced shortly.

Neurological Damage

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the link between the E4 gene and increased risk of neurological damage; and if he will make a statement. [2116]

Mr. Boateng: The APO E4 allelle is associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease. However, this risk is not absolute with only half of those with Alzheimer's disease having E4 and not everyone with E4 developing Alzheimer's. APO E4 is not the only risk factor associated with the disease. There is considerable medical research ongoing in this field including work sponsored by the Medical Research Council which receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Trade and Industry.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the key business targets for the Medicines Control Agency for 1997–98. [2255]

Ms Jowell: We have today placed a copy of the 1997–98 key business targets of the Medicines Control Agency in the Library. We shall, of course, be reviewing the Agency's plans and targets for the longer-term.

Prisoners (HIV/AIDS)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what combination therapies are available for prisoners being treated for HIV/AIDS. [1155]

Ms Jowell: The issue of which therapies to prescribe in combination for individuals with HIV/AIDS is a matter for the treating clinician in consultation with the patient, and taking into account clinical circumstances. Clinical Guidelines outlining the circumstances in which combination therapies would be suitable have recently been published. They are "The British HIV Association Guidelines for Antiretroviral Treatment of HIV Seropositive Individuals", and "The PACT (National Association of Providers of AIDS Care and Treatment) Framework for Antiretroviral Therapy," copies of which are available in the Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those areas of the European convention on human rights which he proposes to incorporate into UK law; and if he will make a statement. [1580]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We propose to incorporate all the rights and freedoms guaranteed under the convention and the First Protocol to it. Some of the provisions in the Convention, such as those relating to the composition of the European Court of Human Rights, are purely procedural and therefore of no domestic relevance.

Assisted Prison Visits

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was his Department's total expenditure on assisted prison visits for people in receipt of specified benefits for the latest year for which figures are available; how many individuals were assisted by such payments; and if he will make a statement. [1569]

Ms Joyce Quin: The total cost of assisted visits to prisons in England and Wales for 1996–97 was £3,824,324.

It is not possible to specify the actual number of individuals who received assistance. The Assisted Prisons Visits Unit computer system records only the number of claims forms received and paid (or rejected) but a person eligible for payment under the scheme is entitled to a maximum of 26 assisted prison visits each year.

Huntingdon Life Sciences

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many visits were made between September and November 1996 by the Named Veterinary Surgeon appointed under section 6(5)(b) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to monitor the welfare of the beagle dogs kept in the Dog Toxicology Unit at Huntingdon Life Sciences; [1761]

(2) on how many occasions between September and November 1996 the named day-to-day care person appointed under section 6(5) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to be responsible for the welfare of the protected animals being held in the Dog Toxicology Unit at Huntingdon Life Sciences, notified personal licence holders that they were concerned for the health or welfare of an animal, in accordance with the procedure laid down in section 6(6)(a) of the Act. [1762]

Mr. George Howarth: These figures are not recorded.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the project licences issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 which are currently valid at Huntingdon Life Sciences cover procedures classified as being of *(a)* mild, *(b)* moderate and *(c)* substantial severity. [1765]

Mr. Howarth: Nineteen of the current licences are rated as mild, 27 as moderate and two as substantial. The classification of individual procedures is not recorded on the central database.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the project licences issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to carry out scientific procedures at Huntingdon Life Sciences were subject to the scrutiny of the Animal Procedures Committee. [1763]

Mr. Howarth: Two of the current licences were considered by the Animal Procedures Committee prior to granting.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the project licences authorising the carrying-out of scientific procedures at Huntingdon Life Sciences have been issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [1764]

Mr. Howarth: There are currently 48 project licences issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 at that establishment.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions between September and November 1996 the Home Office Inspectorate visited Huntingdon Life Sciences, under section 18(2) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; how many of these visits were to monitor scientific procedures in the

Dog Toxicology Unit; what reports were made to him in accordance with section 18(2)(e); and how many animals were considered to be undergoing excessive suffering and dealt with in accordance with the procedure laid down in section 18(3) of the Act following these visits. [1760]

Mr. Howarth: Six inspectorate visits were made to the establishment in that period. Dog Toxicology Units were visited on three occasions; on two of these, the performance of regulated procedures was observed. One visit involved two Inspectors.

Reports on each of these visits were produced and forwarded to the Chief Inspector.

No excessive suffering, requiring animals to be put down, was observed.

Dogs (Scientific Procedures)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds an exemption was granted under section 10(3) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to allow the use of non-purpose bred dogs in scientific procedures in 1995. [1740]

Mr. George Howarth: The grounds were that suitable dogs were not available from designated sources.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the source and breed of the 66 non-purpose bred dogs acquired from non-designated sources in the United Kingdom used in scientific procedures in 1995. [1741]

Mr. Howarth: The dogs were provided by their owners who gave informed consent. A range of crossbred and pedigree animals was used.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1683]

Mr. Straw: For all publications, consideration is given at an early stage to the needs of the blind and partially sighted.

My Department has produced the fire safety publication 'Fire Safety in the Home' in Braille, on audio tape and in large print. These are publicised in a catalogue made available to all fire brigades in England and Wales which can order supplies for free distribution to the public. Copies have also been supplied to the Royal National Institute for the Blind for distribution on request.

Audio cassette versions of 'Your Practical Guide to Crime Prevention' and 'Domestic Violence—Don't Stand For It' have been produced. These are publicised in a catalogue sent to all Crime Prevention Officers in England and Wales, through whom copies are made freely available to the public.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inspections were carried out by his Department's inspectors under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 at each of the Ministry of Defence establishments conducting animal experiments under the Act in each year since 1993. [1877]

Mr. George Howarth: Two Ministry of Defence establishments are designated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. In each respective year since 1993, the Inspectorate has carried out three, two, six and five visits to one establishment and seven, six, 13 and 13 to the other. In the first five months of 1997, one and four visits (respectively) have been carried out.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances reports arising from Home Office inspections under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 are available to the public. [1878]

Mr. Howarth: The role of the Inspectorate is to advise the Secretary of State. Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 prohibits the publication of any information which has been given in confidence. Reports from visits of inspection are not therefore made public.

PRIME MINISTER

National Competitiveness

11. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Prime Minister what steps he will be taking to improve national competitiveness. [557]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade, has set out today our plans for a competitive economy.

1. We will ensure that our workforce is equipped with the skills necessary in a modern, competitive economy.
2. We will reform Britain's competition laws because we know more competitive markets are a spur to firms to become more competitive.
3. We will cut unnecessary "red tape" and simplify government to reduce burdens on business.
4. We will legislate on late payment because we know late payment hurts small firms and thriving small firms will be the foundation of a more competitive Britain.
5. We will set a deadline for the completion of Europe's Single Market, clearing away trade barriers and unfair state aids, to give Britain's business access to the world's largest market.

British Telecom

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his oral answer of 21 May, *Official Report*, column 706, if his words mean that no one on his behalf gave an indication that British Telecom would not be included in the windfall tax. [1707]

The Prime Minister: No undertakings have been given to any individual company.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

United Nations (Dues in Arrears)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those countries which are currently in arrears with their dues to the United Nations; and if he will make a statement. [1883]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: On 30 April 1997, 79 Member States owed assessed contributions for prior years to the UN regular budget. These Member States are listed below. We urge all Member States to follow the UK example and pay their UN dues promptly and in full, in accordance with their legal obligation to do so.

Member States with outstanding contributions for prior years to the UN regular budget at 30 April 1997

Afghanistan
Angola
Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Armenia
Azerbaijan
Belarus
Bolivia
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burundi
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Chad
Central African Republic
Comoros
Congo
Costa Rica
Croatia
Cuba
Djibouti
Dominica
Ecuador
Equatorial Guinea
Estonia
Gabon
Gambia
Georgia
Grenada
Guatemala
Guinea
Guinea Bissau
Guyana
Haiti
Honduras
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Iraq
Israel
Kazakstan
Korea (Democratic People's Republic of)
Kyrgyzstan
Latvia
Liberia
Lithuania
Macedonia (The Former Yugoslav Republic)
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali
Mauritania
Moldova (Republic of)
Nicaragua
Niger
Peru
Qatar
Romania
Rwanda
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Sao Tome and Principe
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Solomon Islands
Somalia
Sudan
Suriname
Swaziland
Tajikistan
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Turkmenistan
Ukraine
United States of America
Uruguay
Uzbekistan
Vanuatu
Venezuela
Yemen
Yugoslavia

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Competitiveness

Mr. Casale: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on her plans to promote competitiveness. [2121]

Mrs. Beckett: As a first step, I intend to publish an audit of the UK's competitiveness to provide an objective benchmark of how well the UK is performing in every factor of competitiveness.

This will be followed by a period of extensive consultation with people who play a leading role in business, beginning with a Competitiveness Summit in July.

I am also setting up an Advisory Group on competitiveness, which I will chair and which will comprise leading business figures, people from small firms and representatives of the workforce. This Group will be assisted by a number of working groups which will examine specific aspects of competitiveness. Its remit will be to report to me on all aspects of the competitiveness agenda, including giving advice on policy development for a White Paper on Competitiveness to be published early next year.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish the representations she has received from the small business sector regarding the implications of a statutory national minimum wage; and if she will make a statement. [846]

Mr. Ian McCartney: A majority of members at the annual conference of the Federation of Small Businesses recently voted for a motion in support of the National Minimum Wage. The independent Low Pay Commission will undertake a wide ranging consultation exercise seeking the views of employers, including small businesses, on the National Minimum Wage and related issues.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will use the Treasury model to estimate the impact on employment of the introduction of a statutory national minimum wage at *(a)* £4.00 per hour, *(b)* £4.25 per hour and *(c)* £4.60 per hour; and if she will make a statement. [845]

Mr. McCartney: We will ask the independent Low Pay Commission, before it reaches a recommendation on the level at which the National Minimum Wage might be set, to take into account all the economic circumstances, including its likely impact. Any model will be sensitive to the assumptions put into it and I will not speculate about the possible effects of hypothetical levels before the Commission has had a chance to consider the issues.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to advise the Low Pay Commission to consider a regional element to the minimum wage; and if she will make a statement. [1278]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 3 June 1997]:* The Government has made clear its intention to introduce a National Minimum Wage.

ECGD

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what were the amounts of ECGD exposure in each member country of the present Gulf Co-operation Council in each year since 1983. [1344]

Mrs. Roche: ECGD is currently in the process of migrating its business database to a new computer system and for this reason exposure figures can be provided immediately for the last two years only:

Amounts at risk

£ million

	31 March 1996	*31 March 1997*
Saudi Arabia	976	976
UAE	270	148
Bahrain	179	167
Qatar	362	544
Oman	677	603
Kuwait	509	348

I shall write to my hon. Friend with fuller details next month and place a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the total outstanding sum of ECGD *(a)* exposure and *(b)* amounts (i) recovered, (ii) not recovered, (iii) written off and (iv) rescheduled in each year since 1987–88 for *(A)* Iraq, *(B)* Jordan and *(C)* Nigeria. [1343]

Mrs. Roche: ECGD is currently in the process of migrating its business database to a new computer system and for this reason I am not immediately in a position to provide the details my hon. Friend has requested.

These details will be available next month and I will write to my hon. Friend with them as soon as possible thereafter and place a copy in the Library of the House.

TREASURY

Retail Prices Index (Scotland)

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will produce a retail prices index for Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [1581]

Mrs. Liddell: There are no plans to produce an RPI for Scotland.

Windfall tax

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider imposing a windfall tax when Green Belt land is rezoned for development; and if he will make a statement about the removal of incentives for the owners of such land to seek such rezoning. [1888]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: It would not be appropriate to comment on any possible tax changes during the run up to the Budget.

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications of the United States/United Kingdom Tax Treaty and Totalisator Agreement on the payment of a windfall tax by United States entities; with which other countries similar agreements exist; and if he will make a statement. [1736]

Mr. Robinson: The treatment under the United States/United Kingdom Tax Treaty and Totalisation Agreement of a windfall tax paid by United Kingdom companies can be determined only when the details of the tax are announced and can be considered by the United States authorities. The United Kingdom has similar tax treaties with around 100 other countries worldwide. I understand that the Totalisation Agreement concerns social security matters which do not appear relevant to a windfall tax.

No. 11 Downing Street (Catering)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his policy in respect of the contractual arrangements for catering for No. 11 Downing Street. [1468]

Mr. Gordon Brown: There are no contractual arrangements for catering at No. 11, as the choice of caterers used is a matter of personal preference. Those used at official functions are security cleared and chosen by officials. Organisers of non-official functions are also strongly advised to use caterers with security clearance.

Fuel (VAT)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the estimated average savings per week produced by the reduction in VAT on domestic fuel from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. for *(a)* the average household, *(b)* those in the lowest decile of income distribution, *(c)* those in the highest decile of income distribution and *(d)* old age pensioners. [1880]

Ms Primarolo: A reduction in VAT on domestic fuel and power from 8 per cent. to 5 per cent. would result in estimated savings in 1997–98 of about:

35p per week for the average household; and

35p and 40p per week for those in the lowest and highest deciles respectively. The deciles are based on net income adjusted for household size.

30p per week for households with a pensioner head.

Additional Voluntary Contributions

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to allow the holders of additional voluntary contributions to delay receiving their annuity from additional voluntary contributions beyond their retirement; and if he will make a statement. [1802]

Ms Primarolo: The payment of benefit from additional voluntary contributions is under review.

Political and Personal Appointments

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many political and personal appointments he has made; and at what cost to public funds. [1116]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Treasury Ministers have appointed four Special Advisers to be paid from public funds. No salaries have yet been agreed. I will write to the right hon. and learned Member with information about the cost to public funds at a later date.

Interest Rates

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which lead indicators the Treasury evaluated in March 1997 in determining whether interest rates should be eased, tightened or remain the same. [1873]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The minutes of the Monthly Monetary Meeting held on 5 March between the previous Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England were published on 23 April 1997.

Monetary Policy

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 20 May, *Official Report*, column 508, (1) what is his definition *(a)* descriptively and *(b)* numerically of price stability; [1861]

(2) over what time scale the Bank of England will be expected to achieve new inflation targets when they are set. [1870]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Chancellor will set out the Government's approach to monetary policy in his Mansion House speech on 12 June.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his oral statement of 20 May, *Official Report*, column 508, what factors could prejudice the Bank of England's ability to achieve price stability whilst supporting the Government's economic policy. [1862]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Government believe that low inflation is an essential precondition for high and stable levels of growth and employment. However, as we have seen over the past 18 years, excessively loose monetary policies have encouraged short but unsustainable booms, followed by higher inflation, recessions and unemployment. The Chancellor will set out the Government's approach to monetary policy in his Mansion House speech on 12 June.

European Union Grants

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total sum provided in grants, loans and subsidies to the United Kingdom over the past five years from the European Union; and what part of the total was given to bodies within the borough of Southend on Sea. [1692]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The United Kingdom's total public sector receipts from the European Community, together with details of grants from the European Coal and Steel Community, for the financial years 1992–93 to 1996–97 are set out in the following table:

£ million

	Public sector receipts	*ECSC grants*
1992–93	2,810	47
1993–94	3,865	13
1994–95	3,603	42
1995–96	3,783	51
1996–97	4,542	28

In addition to public sector receipts there are certain receipts, for research and development, which are mainly paid direct to the private sector and are not covered here.

European Investment Bank loans to projects within the United Kingdom over the period 1992 to 1995 were as follows:

1992: £1.80 million

1993: £1.50 million

1994: £1.92 million

1995: £1.87 million

Information on 1996 is not yet available.

I regret that information is not available on how much of these receipts, grants and loans went to recipients in Southend on Sea.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the average percentage reduction in household income which would result from the withdrawal of mortgage interest relief for home-owning households with income in each of the ten deciles of household income. [1852]

Ms Primarolo *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* Information for 1997–98 is given in the table. The estimates are based on information projected from the 1994–95 Family Expenditure Survey and are therefore provisional.

Average percentage reduction in households income[1] as a result of withdrawing mortgage interest relief

Household income decile group	*Average percentage reduction for households with a mortgage*
Lowest ten per cent.	:—
Second	1.3
Third	1.6
Fourth	1.9
Fifth	1.9
Sixth	1.6
Seventh	1.4
Eighth	1.2
Ninth	0.9
Highest ten per cent.	0.7

[1] Household income is defined as income from all sources less income tax payments and National Insurance Contributions.
[2] Insufficient data to provide a reliable estimate.

DEFENCE

Armed Services (Redundancies)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men and women were made redundant in the armed services in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [1884]

Dr. John Reid: I will write to the hon. Member.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems will be millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1252]

Mr. Spellar: Since early last year the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has been embarked on a programme to tackle the Year 2000 problem across all aspects of Defence, from routine support systems through to front line operational equipment.

My Department is managing its Year 2000 programme under the auspices of guidelines set by the Cabinet Office IT Unit (CITU) and is working closely with the Government Centre for Information Systems (CCTA) as a member of its Year 2000 Public Sector Group. Guidance which details the actions that need to be taken has been made widely available within the Department. All candidate systems are being surveyed and any necessary corrective action is being planned/undertaken. To ensure that suitable skilled resources are available without delay, "enabling" contracts have been placed with a number of companies.

An MOD Steering Committee has been established to oversee the programme with representation covering the breadth of the Department. In addition, a central help desk is operating successfully and an extensive awareness campaign is being mounted across my Department, with the aim of engaging the commitment of everyone in ensuring that all Defence systems are Year 2000 compliant before the 31 December, 1999.

MOD Homes (Isle of Wight)

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the homes owned by his Department on the Isle of Wight are currently empty. [1773]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has just one house on the Isle of Wight and this is underleased from Annington Homes Ltd. The house is presently occupied.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment (Young People)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his policy towards unemployed young people; and what will be the maximum period of being out of education and training yet seeking work which will not count as unemployment. [1646]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Our policy is to help young people gain the skills and experience they need to enable them to find and sustain employment.

The precise way in which measures of unemployment and labour market activity should be treated as the subject of public consultation by the Office for National Statistics.

Unemployment Benefit Disqualifications

Mr. Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many unemployed claimants for the north London district of the Employment Service have *(a)* been issued with warning letters for not actively seeking work, *(b)* had their claim referred to an adjudicating officer for not actively seeking work, *(c)* had their claims allowed or disallowed for not actively seeking work and *(d)* had their claim referred to an adjudicating officer for refusing suitable employment; and how many of those in (d) have had their benefit (i) disqualified and (ii) not disqualified in each year since 1989; [828]

(2) how many employers have participated in job interview guarantee work trials in respect of the north London district of the Employment Service in each year since 1991; how many claimants have participated in such work trials; how many claimants are currently participating in work trials; and how many participants have obtained full-time employment with their work trial employer; [829]

(3) how many people have joined job clubs in each year since 1991 in respect of the north London district of the Employment Service; how many have left; how many leavers obtained jobs; what were the other outcomes of leavers broken down by *(a)* ethnic origin and *(b)* gender; and if he will make a statement; [830]

(4) how many unemployed people have been referred to *(a)* restart courses, *(b)* jobplan workshops, and *(c)* workwise courses, by Employment Service counsellors in the north London district of the Employment Service in each year since 1991; how many attended and completed the course; what were the outcomes of the participants; how many had benefit penalties imposed for (1) not attending and (2) failing to complete their attendance at the workshops or courses; and if he will make a statement; [831]

(5) if he will list the *(a)* gender, *(b)* duration of unemployment and *(c)* ethnic origin of those who have entered Training for Work; and if he will indicate whether they have a disability (i) in respect of (1) the North London training and enterprise council and (2) the London region and (ii) in total; [832]

(6) how many income support and unemployment benefit claimants for the north London district covering the London borough of Haringey have *(a)* successfully and *(b)* unsuccessfully claimed income support under the hardship rules in each year since 1989, showing those whose claim was in doubt due to *(a)* not actively seeking work, *(b)* refusing suitable employment, *(c)* availability for work and *(d)* not attending a restart course, a jobplan workshop or a workwise course; and if he will make a statement; [833]

(7) how many people have attended a restart interview in each year since 1991 in respect of the north London district of the Employment Service; and what were the results of those interviews broken down in the same way as the answer of 18 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *148*. [834]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of the questions has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. Bernie Grant, dated 4 June 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions requesting various statistics about the North London District of the Employment Service. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

You asked a number of questions about our North London District and I thought it would be helpful if I answered them in turn in one reply.

It may help if I first of all explain that North London District was created as part of the boundary review, which saw the introduction of the district structure to the Employment Service, in April 1994. This and the fact that we only keep information regionally for three years unfortunately means that we can only provide the material you require going back to 1994. However, I hope the data given below is helpful.

I should explain that the information on number of warning letters issued to job seekers for not actively seeking employment is not recorded. It may, however, be helpful to explain that since August 1992 it has not been a requirement for warning letters to be issued in every case of inadequate job search. Since this date warning letters have only been issued if Jobcentre staff consider a job seeker genuinely not to have understood what was required of them. The number of referrals to Adjudication Officers for not Actively Seeking Employment and for Refusal of Employment have only been recorded since April this year. Prior to this only the number of decisions made were recorded.

The following table shows the information available in respect of Actively Seeking Employment and Refusal of Employment in our North London District since 1994.

	1994–95	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Actively seeking employment			
Decisions made	244	413	462
Allowances	29	56	56
Disallowances	215	357	406
Refusal of employment			
Decisions made	47	288	247
Allowances	13	61	53
Disallowances	34	227	194

In relation to your question about Job Interview Guarantee Work Trials, it may help if I explain that Work Trials were established as a separate programme from the Job Interview Guarantee scheme in April 1993. The table below shows the number of Work Trials and subsequent job placings in the North London District since 1994. I should explain that we do not record the number of employers that participate in Work Trials, only the actual number that takes place.

Work trials	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Number of work trials	226	427	420
Number gaining employment	125	227	189

The following table shows the information on Jobclubs you requested for the North London District since April 1994. We do not record information on leavers broken down by gender and ethnic origin.

Jobclub	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Number of starts in period	6,502	5,624	3,421
Number of leavers in period	5,975	6,081	3,377
Job entries	2,746	2,237	1,069
Referred to other programmes	—	—	137
Other outcomes	787	842	139
Total positive outcomes	3,533	3,079	1,345

Restart	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Number of referrals	5,057	4,189	3,150
Number of starts	2,560	1,935	1,556
Number of completers	2,222	1,665	1,310
Job entries	—	55	45
Referred to other programmes	—	531	421
Other outcomes	—	124	143
Total positive outcomes	532	710	609
Cases referred to BA	—	358	149

Workwise	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Number of referrals	1,005	802
Number of starts	384	246
Number of completers	284	163
Job entries	34	14
Referred to other programmes	100	90
Other outcomes	32	18
Total positive outcomes	166	122
Cases referred to BA	92	17

NB: The difference between "starts" and "completers" arises because some people leave Jobplan, Restart or Workwise courses prior to completion.

The statistical data you asked for in relation to the number of people attending Restart interviews and their results are detailed in the table below. You asked for the results to be broken down in the same way as the Answer of 18 December 1990, Official Report, column 148. It may help if I explain that the range of employment and training opportunities offered has altered and increased since 1991. Training for Work has replaced the Employment Training programme, and the Enterprise Allowance scheme, has been replaced by Business Start-up. The numbers shown for Business Start-up reflect the actual number of people who have opted for self-employment whereas, under the Enterprise Allowance scheme the number of people attending a seminar was measured.

It may help if I explain how the figures above are made up. In the year 1994/95 for example, 6,502 people went into Jobclubs in North London and 5,975 left of which 2,746 went into jobs and 787 into "other outcomes": ie there were 3,533 positive outcomes in total. However, it does not follow that the other 2,442 simply left Jobclubs and returned to unemployment. The Employment Service is only allowed to score as results people who leave a programme and find a job within 13 weeks of their time on the programme ending. People who have been in Jobclubs may well find jobs shortly after that, because their experience in the Jobclub has helped them improve their employability, but in such cases these would not be included in our Jobclub figures.

You asked for similar information about Jobplan, Restart and Workwise courses. It may help if I explain that although we keep records of the number of referrals made to the Benefits Agency where clients fail to attend or complete courses we do not keep records on the outcome of these referrals. I should also explain that we did not keep records of the number of referrals made to the Benefits Agency in 1994/95 and that in 1996/97 we only recorded the number of referrals made up to the end of September prior to the introduction of JSA. Subject to that, the tables below show the information that you requested for the North London District since 1994. You will want to note that the Workwise programme was not introduced until April 1995.

Jobplan	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Number of referrals	10,239	6,998	5,026
Number of starts	4,866	3,124	2,371
Number of completers	4,518	2,836	2,168
Job entries	—	94	146
Referred to other programmes	—	1,023	707
Other outcomes	—	219	229
Total positive outcomes	1,406	1,336	1,082
Cases referred to BA	—	694	303

Restart interviews	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*
Number of interviews	68,201	50,031	48,090
Outcomes			
(a) Job placings	398	788	1,196
(b) Training for work	2,037	1,810	1,542
(c) Jobclub	6,150	4,861	2,246
(d) Restart course	2,7001	1,618	1,322
(e) Business start-up	142	29	46

You asked for details about the numbers of clients applying for Income Support under the hardship rules. It may help if I explain that this is the responsibility of the Benefits Agency, who have provided the table overleaf which provides most of the information you asked for. I understand from the Benefits Agency that they do not keep records of the number of Income Support hardship claims for clients who refused suitable employment. This information may be included in the data relating to availability for work and those not actively seeking work.

When studying the table you will need to take the following points into consideration:

1. Income Support (General) Regulation 8(3) relates to a person who is not treated as available for employment and the Adjudication Officer is satisfied that, unless Income Support is paid, the claimant or member of his family (if any) will suffer hardship.
2. Income Support (General) Regulation 10A(2) relates to a person who is not required to be actively seeking employment and is either pregnant, or one member of a couple is pregnant, is responsible for a child or young person or receives the disability premium and the Adjudication Officer is satisfied that, unless Income Support is paid, the claimant or a member of his family (if any) will suffer hardship.
3. Prior to April 1994 data was collated jointly for Restart and Jobplan.
4. Information has been provided by the BA's Central Data Unit and is subject to amendment.

	1991–92	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*April-September 1996*
IS (Gen) Reg 8(3) hardship decisions						
Awarded	0	0	0	0	0	11
Refused	0	0	0	0	2	3
IS (Gen) Reg 10A(2) hardship decisions						
Awarded	1	0	0	0	0	0
Refused	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jobplan						
40 per cent. reduction	n/a	n/a	n/a	387	235	37
20 per cent. reduction	n/a	n/a	n/a	26	5	0
No reduction	n/a	n/a	n/a	102	161	69
Restart						
40 per cent. reduction	1	0	95	304	126	32
20 per cent. reduction	0	0	15	24	2	4
No reduction	0	0	45	65	71	29
Workwise						
40 per cent. reduction	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	61	15
20 per cent. reduction	n/a	n/a	n/a	25	1	2
No reduction	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	12	9

I hope this information is helpful.

Class Sizes

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the way in which pupil:teacher ratios and class sizes are currently calculated by his Department. [1538]

Mr. Byers: The pupil:teacher ratios (PTRs) within schools are calculated by dividing the total number of pupils on school registers (counting each part-time pupil as 0.5) by the total number of qualified teachers (adjusted to reflect the part-time working of some teachers).

Class sizes are calculated by dividing the numbers of pupils being taught together in classes at a particular point in the school timetable by the number of teachers, qualified or unqualified, deployed in such classes. Average class sizes are normally calculated for those classes involving only one teacher.

Both measures are derived from information collected from the annual count of pupils and teachers in schools in January each year.

Assisted Places

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places, at which schools and at what cost were provided under the assisted places scheme in Northamptonshire in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97. [1808]

Mr. Byers: The number of assisted places taken up and the cost of those places for each participating school in Northamptonshire in academic years 1995–96 and 1996–97 are given in the following table:

Assisted places schemes: Northamptonshire

School name	*Academic year* 1995–96	1996–97
Laxton (Oundle) School		
Number of assisted pupils	8	8
Cost of places £000s	20	20
Northampton High School for Girls		
Number of assisted pupils	168	174
Cost of places £000s	564	628
Wellingborough School		
Number of assisted pupils	65	71
Cost of places £000s	277	301

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many places, at what schools and at what cost were provided under the assisted places scheme in Derbyshire in 1995–96 and 1996–97. [1534]

Mr. Byers: The number of assisted places taken up and the cost of those places for each participating school in Derbyshire in academic years 1995–96 and 1996–97 are given in the following table:

Assisted places scheme: Derbyshire

School name	*Academic year* 1995–96	1996–97
Derby High School		
Number of assisted pupils	30	39
Cost of places £000s	98	141
Mount St. Mary's College		
Number of assisted pupils	71	68
Cost of places £000s	309	294
Repton School		
Number of assisted pupils	64	73
Cost of places £000s	429	512
Trent College		
Number of assisted pupils	137	136
Cost of places £000s	608	636

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1682]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Our manifesto commits us to establishing "comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or at work, developed in partnership with all interested parties." We shall be consulting widely and developing our proposals in partnership with disability organisations, employers, employers organisations, trade unions and others. An essential issue will be the definition of disability. It is not appropriate for me to pre-empt the outcome of that consultation.

Nursery Places (Dorset)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to ensure the provision of nursery places for children in Dorset who would have been eligible for nursery vouchers in the September term 1997. [1777]

Mr. Byers: All Local Education Authorities in England have been invited to submit an interim Early Years Development Plan to secure places for all eligible four year olds in their area for the period until April 1998. LEAs will be expected to consult and co-operate with the private and voluntary sectors in these arrangements.

Where interim Early Years Development Plans are approved, recognised places in all sectors filled by eligible four year olds will be funded by grant provided by the Secretary of State. Where LEAs are unable to bring forward an acceptable interim plan, recognised places chosen by parents in the private and voluntary sectors will be funded by grant from the Secretary of State by reference to certificates of eligibility issued to those parents.

Teaching Redundancies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teaching redundancies are expected in each local education authority at the end of the present academic year; how many there were in each local education authority in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [1370]

Mr. Byers: This information is not collected centrally.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many newly qualified teachers failed to gain employment on leaving college in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [1371]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows the number of students who successfully completed initial teacher training and their employment status at 31 March in the year after completion, for the most recent years available.

Position of BEd and PGCE completers at 31 March following calendar year of completion[2]

	Calendar year of completion				
	1990	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*
Total completers in England and Wales	15,830	17,300	20,700	23,340	25,440
In service[1] *at 31 March of year following completion in England and Wales:*					
Maintained schools	12,080	13,240	14,550	16,240	17,290
Other service[4]	520	460	750	880	980
Never in service[1] in England and Wales	3,160	3,520	5,320	6,150	7,110

Source:
DfEE, Database of Teacher Records.
Notes:
[1] The position at 31 March in the year after completion comes from service records collected for the Teachers' Superannuation Scheme (TSS). Qualified students who obtain a teaching appointment in an institution that is not covered by the TSS are shown as "never in service". For example, those who take up appointments in the "old" university sector, in the independent sector without TSS membership, or outside England and Wales.
[2] A considerable number of newly qualified teachers take a year or more before starting teaching. Data from teachers qualifying in 1993 indicate that around 8 per cent. were not in service in March 1994, but were in service one year later.
[3] Including less than 100 teachers who entered service following completion of ITT who had already left by 31 March of the year following completion.
[4] Any other sector or institutions with TSS membership, eg some independent schools, further education.

Office for Standards in Education Reports

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to make available hard copies of Ofsted reports to *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public. [2139]

Mr. Byers: At present each inspected school is responsible for making its Ofsted inspection report available to parents and others. Each report is freely accessible on the internet. Hon. Members can obtain hard copies through the Library.

Primary Class Sizes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for each local education authority in England and Wales how many classes for five to seven-year-olds had more than 30 children as at Easter 1997. [2219]

Mr. Byers: Information on class sizes for local education authorities in England is not available in the form requested.

Information on class sizes for local education authorities in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Open Government

9. **Ms Abbott:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to increase openness in government. [527]

Dr. David Clark: In our manifesto, the Government were clear in their commitment to the regeneration of our democratic process. Central to that is the White Paper on New Government I announced yesterday.

This will set out how we will deliver accountable, accessible, responsive and efficient Government.

These proposals alongside our Freedom of Information Act will bring an agenda of openness to our system of Government at all levels.

14. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce a freedom of information Bill; and if he will make a statement. [533]

Dr. Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend, the Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones).

15. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he expects to publish his proposals relating to freedom of information. [535]

17. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what steps he is taking to promote open government. [538]

19. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his proposals in respect of open government. [540]

20. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what initiatives he is taking to promote open government. [541]

Dr. Clark: I refer hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson).

Quangos

13. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what timetable he proposes for *(a)* reducing the number of quangos and *(b)* making the remaining quangos more democratic. [531]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government propose to undertake a review of quangos with a view to reducing their numbers. The issue of making the remainder more democratic will be addressed in the context of the forthcoming White Paper on Better Government, announced yesterday by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Freedom of Information (Commercial Confidentiality)

16. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to ensure that issues of commercial confidentiality do not restrict the scope of freedom of information legislation. [536]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Provision to protect genuine commercial confidentiality is necessary in freedom of information legislation but this must be kept to the minimum consistent with the public interest in openness.

Government Departments (Electronic Access)

18. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what plans he has to introduce greater electronic access by citizens to Government Departments. [539]

Mr. Kilfoyle: Government are determined to use the tremendous potential of IT to bring government closer to the people and provide them with a more direct and accessible service for the 21st century.

Civil Service

21. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will meet representatives of civil service unions to discuss conditions of service. [542]

Dr. David Clark: I have already met civil service union representatives and morale and conditions of service were among the issues raised.

Government Agencies

22. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what proposals he has to review the relationship of Government agencies with *(a)* Government Departments, *(b)* Ministers and *(c)* Parliament. [543]

Mr. Kilfoyle: In the first instance, it is for the Minister responsible for each particular agency to keep these important relationships in good order but we are considering whether there are any matters of general application that need to be addressed. We will do this in the context of our commitment to modernising Government services and making them more responsive.

Government Appointments

23. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what new procedures he proposes for the appointment to paid posts nominated by the Government. [544]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Government will continue to support the principle of selection based on merit. Ministerial appointments to executive non-departmental public bodies and NHS bodies have been subject to the Commissioner for Public Appointments' Code of Practice since 1 July 1996. The Government will be considering with the Commissioner whether his remit should be extended to other public bodies.

Deregulation

24. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will make a statement on his policy towards deregulation. [545]

Dr. David Clark: Our aim is to create the economic conditions in which business can flourish. We want to modernise Government for business—particularly small firms—and citizens. That is why we have undertaken to cut unnecessary red tape and not to impose burdensome new regulations.

Scottish Devolution

25. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what role he has in relation to Her Majesty's Government's proposals for Scottish devolution. [546]

Dr. David Clark: I will take part in collective discussion of the issues with my colleagues, especially in relation to those issues which fall within my departmental responsibilities.

Internet

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he intends to continue to implement government.direct. [532]

Mr. Kilfoyle: The Green Paper government.direct contained many good ideas. The Government will harness the power of IT to bring government closer to the people and provide better services for everybody. We will consult interested parties on a range of ideas for taking this forward, including those in government.direct and the paper responding to the initial comments on it.

Civil Service (Staff Morale)

Mr. Ainger: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster when he intends to meet representatives of the civil service unions to discuss staff morale. [537]

Dr. David Clark: I have already met civil service union representatives and morale and conditions of service were among the issues raised.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Civil Service (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals she has to increase the number of ethnic minority employees in her Department. [739]

Mr. Field: The Department supports the Cabinet Office Programme for Action on Race and is fully committed to developing a culturally diverse workforce. Its recruitment procedures are designed to encourage people from ethnic backgrounds to be successful in job applications. Recruitment is by fair and open competition and selection is based on merit. Advertisements are placed in the ethnic minority press and with Local Racial Equality Councils and we also undertake outreach projects. Recruitment exercises are monitored to ensure equal treatment for all applicants and to ensure that those involved in the monitoring process have all received equal opportunities awareness training.

In addition the Department sponsors 20 Windsor fellows a year, which is an opportunity for ethnic minority undergraduates to undertake work placements within the DSS.

Long-term Unemployment

Mr. Whitehead: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to review the working of current rules governing the consequences of long-term unemployed people obtaining temporary work and then returning to benefits; and if she will make a statement. [840]

Mr. Field: Our New Deal measures will offer new opportunities to the long-term unemployed of all ages. Employers who take on long-term unemployed people aged over 25 will receive a subsidy of £75 per week, and the employee will receive an opportunity to demonstrate both their existing skills and their potential for acquiring new ones.

Over the next few months we shall be looking closely at all the features of the benefit system which might have an impact on work incentives.

Appeals Tribunal

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will review the existing operation of appeals tribunals for applicants to *(a)* the jobseekers allowance and *(b)* incapacity benefit. [858]

Mr. Bradley: We intend to bring forward legislation to improve current decision making and appeals arrangements for all social security benefits. Further details will be announced in due course.

Child Support

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list the number and percentage of Child Support Agency cases in which the absent parent is in arrears *(a)* in total and *(b)* by regional office for each year since the establishment of the agency. [1359]

Mr. Bradley: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mrs. Faith Boardman. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Faith Boardman to Ms Roseanna Cunningham, dated 3 June 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the number and percentage of cases in which the absent parent is in arrears.

The latest available data on the total number of live cases with a full or interim maintenance assessment (FMA or IMA) held on the child support computer system shows that on 30 April 1997 there were 599,600 live and assessed cases. A breakdown is not available by Child Support Agency Centre.

The total number of Child Support Agency cases with arrears outstanding from the absent parent is 300,903, or 50% of all live and assessed cases. This figure comprises 61,992 category A IMA cases, (10% of all live and assessed cases) and 238,911 FMA and other IMA cases, (40% of all live and assessed cases). Arrears include, initial payment period maintenance, current maintenance, maintenance arrears, interest and rescheduled arrears. The table below shows a breakdown of these cases by Child Support Agency Centre.

	IMA cat A	*FMA and other IMAs*	*Total*
Dudley	11,025	41,196	52,221
Hastings	8,031	31,565	39,596
Falkirk	11,132	40,474	51,606
Plymouth	11,430	43,235	54,665
Birkenhead	8,530	39,200	47,730
Belfast	11,844	43,241	55,085
Agency total	61,992	238,911	300,903

The Agency does not have historical data on the number of cases with arrears outstanding to give comparisons for previous years. The information above represents a 'snapshot' view of the number of arrears cases at 23 May 1997.

An IMA is usually imposed where the absent parent, parent with care or their respective partners do not provide all the information required under Child Support legislation to make a FMA. They are intended to encourage compliance.

One of four different categories of IMA can be imposed depending on the nature of the missing information, ie category A, B, C or D. The vast majority of IMAs issued are punitive Category As which are intended to encourage compliance. Category B and D IMAs may or may not be punitive depending on the circumstances of the case. Category C IMAs are non-punitive and are used to allow self-employed absent parents extra time to provide the required financial details.

I hope this is helpful.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimates his Department has made of the cumulative savings which have resulted from compulsory competitive tendering. [235]

Mr. Raynsford: Research commissioned by the Department identified savings alongside changes to the quality of local services. It shows average annual savings on contract prices of blue-collar services of 6 per cent. for the first round of tendering under the Local Government Act 1988, and 9 per cent. for the second round. The research also indicates that these savings have been accompanied by only minor improvements in service standards, and that more attention needs to be given to the development of local performance indicators.

Other research, commissioned outside the Department, suggests a wide variation in estimates of savings depending upon the way in which social costs and benefits are treated.

Whales and Dolphins

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he plans to take to increase protection for whales and dolphins within UK waters; and if he will make a statement. [1074]

Ms Angela Eagle: All cetaceans are subject to the highest level of statutory protection in UK waters.

The UK is a signatory to the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans in the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS), and a member of the International Whaling Commission.

A biodiversity species action plan for the harbour porpoise is in place which has as its objective the maintenance of the current range and abundance, with a longer term aim of ensuring that no anthropogenic factors inhibit the return to waters that previously held the harbour porpoise.

The Government will be considering the effectiveness of these measures.

Plutonium Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the predicted dose level attributed to plutonium wastes in the HMIP report TR-Z2-9 Tyrer et al. 1995; and how this compared to the target levels set out in the Radioactive Waste Management Policy White Paper (Cm 2919). [1778]

Mr. Meacher: The maximum dose calculated in the report was 9 sieverts per year as a very unlikely worst case. But as no estimate of probability was made for the scenario producing this dose, it cannot be compared with the target of a one in a million per year risk of developing a fatal cancer or serious hereditary defect, set out in the White Paper, "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy" (Cm 2919).

In undertaking this work, HMIP rehearsed some of the procedures and methods which it might need to apply in detailed examination of modelling studies underlying a post-closure safety case for a radioactive waste repository. The studies were not designed to inform HMIP about the suitability of a particular site for the development of a repository.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the level of plutonium contamination in the plutonium contaminated wastes which would be produced by the Sellafield MOX plant. [1798]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has made no estimate of his own. I am informed that the operation of the Sellafield MOX plant would be likely to give rise to some 120 cubic metres of plutonium contaminated material (defined as solid waste containing more than 0.1 gigabecquerels per tonne of plutonium) per year.

Magnox Power Stations

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what licensing and planning arrangements are planned to govern the transfer of Magnox power stations from operational to decommissioned status. [1783]

Mr. Meacher: Licensing of civil nuclear sites under the Nuclear Installations Act 1965 (as amended) is a continuous process, from when a licence is granted until decommissioning is complete and the site presents no danger. There is no need, therefore, for any changes to the licensing regime as Magnox power stations transfer from operational to decommissioned status. Nuclear operators are required under the licence to agree detailed plans for decommissioning their plant with the Health and Safety Executive's HM Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Under Directive 97/11/EC, which amends Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment, an environmental impact assessment will be required specially for the decommissioning of nuclear power stations. The new Directive is due to be implemented by March 1999.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the research reports prepared by the Disposal Safety Assessment Team managed by AEA Technology on behalf of Nirex. [1789]

Mr. Meacher: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has undertaken no assessment of these reports.

Internal Migration

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the extent of internal migration between each region of the United Kingdom; if he will place this research in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [1366]

Mr. Caborn: My Department is planning to commission research to review existing data and evidence on the determinants of migration flows in England, to help assess the feasibility of formally modelling migration flows as part of the economic modelling of household formation and the demand and need for housing at regional and sub-regional level. The work should be completed towards the end of 1997, and the usual practice is then to publish a research report.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) analyse recent migration statistics to derive population estimates for England and constituent local authority areas. Assumptions about future migration flows between the four countries of the United Kingdom are developed by the Government Actuary's Department, as part of the process of producing national population projections—the latest projections are published by The Stationery Office in the volume "1994-based National population projections". Assumptions about future migration flows within England, based on recent trends and informed by consultation with local authorities, are prepared as part of the development of the ONS sub-national population projections for shire counties, metropolitan districts and London boroughs. The latest projections are published under the title "1993-based Subnational population projections".

Capital Receipts

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the capital receipts from the sale of council houses currently held by each local authority; and if he will make a statement. [1368]

Ms Armstrong: A table setting out the information requested has been placed in the Library of the House. We will be consulting the Local Government Association and local authorities on the Government's Capital Receipts Initiative in due course.

Household Projections Survey

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will evaluate the findings of the Household Projections Survey; and if he will make a statement. [1369]

Mr. Caborn: My Department has not commissioned any survey as such into the household projections.

The most recent (1992-based) household projections were published in March 1995 in "Projections of Households in England to 2016", a copy of which is in the Library of the House. These household projections have been subject to considerable public scrutiny, in particular by the Environment Select Committee in evidence for its report on Housing Need in 1996. Whilst generally endorsing the projections, the Committee recommended that the Department continue to examine the extent to which household formation is affected by economic and social factors. This is currently being addressed by the Department of Applied Economics, Cambridge University, as part of a wider research project for the Department on the modelling of the need for social housing. The project should be finalised by the Autumn.

Last year, the Department also commissioned Heriot-Watt University to undertake a detailed literature review on household formation, with particular emphasis on evaluating the available evidence on the extent to which economic factors affect the propensity for new households to form. This work has recently been completed and I would expect the report to be published as soon as practicable.

Local Authority Financial Support

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the changes proposed in the Elliott report on local authority financial support; what further studies he has initiated; and if he will make a statement. [1570]

Mr. Raynsford: The work of Professor Elliott and the Review of the Area Cost Adjustment provided a useful examination of the issues, though not one which the Local Authority Associations wanted implemented for 1997–98 SSAs. The Department has recently commissioned research to examine some of the concerns of local government about the Review's proposals. It will report in early July and we shall discuss with local government both the findings and the way forward on the Area Cost Adjustment.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list each of the areas to be covered by regional development agencies; and if he will make a statement. [1367]

Mr. Caborn: I will be making an announcement shortly about our intention to set up Regional Development Agencies.

TRANSPORT

Marine Safety Agency

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how his Department will enforce the implementation of British Marine Safety Agency staffing requirements and the new EU VAT directives. [1429]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Marine Safety Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from R. M. Bradley to Mr. Andrew George, dated 4 June 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your Question about the enforcement of UK qualification requirements for masters and officers of large privately-owned commercially-operated yachts.

It may be helpful if I summarise the background. Until recently, masters and officers on vessels of this kind were required to comply with the deck officer qualification requirements in UK merchant shipping regulations. Many people working in the professional yachting industry, however, found it impossible to obtain the necessary certificates because they had come to professional yachting from leisure yachting and could not meet the requirement to have worked on merchant navy vessels for a minimum specified period. In consequence, the regulation were not being observed. This resulted in substantial variations in the standards of competence of officers working on these vessels.

Therefore, in consultation with the industry, sail training organisations and the Warsash Maritime Operations Centre, the Agency has developed an alternative qualification. This is the Deck Officer Class 5 (or 4) with command endorsement and is limited to yachts and sail training vessels. It requires a base qualification of the Royal Yachting Association/Department of Transport certificate of competence Yachtmaster Offshore (or Ocean) with commercial endorsement. This is more readily obtainable by those who work in the professional yachting industry and, when allied with a number of additional mandatory training modules, provides the knowledge and experience which we and the industry consider necessary for the safe operation of these large yachts. It can be seen that the MSA has worked closely with industry and other interested parties to develop a qualification which will be relevant to the operation of these vessels. You should also be aware that this Code and the associated qualifications for the Masters and Officers will be adopted by the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, the Isle of Man and, in due course the British Virgin Islands.

Our approach on enforcement will be to allow our recognised classification societies to carry out the survey and certification of vessels classed with them. The enforcement of these requirements will in general be through our usual practice of inspecting both ships and the service providers to ensure that the standards are being complied with. However we would envisage further discussions with the industry and all other interested parties on the details of the enforcement regime to be employed in view of the distribution of the vessels throughout the world.

I am sorry I cannot comment on the new EU VAT Directive which falls outside my areas of responsibility. May I suggest that you direct this enquiry to HM Custom and Excise.

SCOTLAND

Special Needs Education

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the percentage of children recorded as having special needs in primary schools in each council area in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, and *(c)* 1997. [1364]

Mr. Wilson: The percentage of children with Records of Needs in publicly-funded schools for 1995 and 1996 is as follows:-

Education authority	*1995*	*1996*
Aberdeen City	0.7	0.7
Aberdeenshire	0.8	0.7
Angus	1.6	1.5
Argyll and Bute	0.6	0.7
Clackmannanshire	0.5	0.4
Dumfries and Galloway	1.5	1.8
Dundee City	2.0	1.9
East Ayshire	1.4	1.2
East Dunbartonshire	0.3	0.3
East Lothian	0.7	0.7
East Renfrewshire	0.8	0.9
Edinburgh City	0.6	0.7
Falkirk	0.7	0.8
Fife	0.3	0.4
Glasgow City	0.7	0.6
Highland	1.8	1.6
Inverclyde	1.0	1.2
Midlothian	0.4	0.4
Moray	1.2	1.2
North Ayrshire	0.9	1.0
North Lanarkshire	0.7	0.6
Orkney Islands	0.4	0.5
Perth and Kinross	1.2	1.3
Renfrewshire	1.0	0.9
Scottish Borders	1.1	1.2
Shetland Islands	1.8	1.8
South Ayrshire	1.1	1.1
South Lanarkshire	0.7	0.7
Stirling	0.5	0.4
West Dunbartonshire	0.3	0.3
West Lothian	0.3	0.5
Western Isles	2.3	2.6
All Scotland	0.8	0.8

The information requested is collected each autumn as part of the Scotish Office Education and Industry Department's census of schools and information for 1997 is not yet available. The data for 1995 has been disaggregated from the returns compiled on the former regional council basis.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to allow Scottish Homes tenants to have a local authority option in the event of a housing stock transfer. [1730]

Mr. Chisholm: We are reviewing the arrangements for the transfer of Scottish Homes houses in the light of the Government's commitment to give tenants choice in their landlord.

Whisky Industry

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were employed in the Scotch whisky distilling industry for each year since 1990. [1362]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 June 1997]:* The information requested, for September each year, is given in the table.

Number of employees directly employed within the Scottish whisky industry

	Number
1990	16,376
1991	15,310
1992	15,035
1993	14,768
1994	13,804
1995	13,698
1996	13,345

Source:
Scotch Whisky Association.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the President of the Council by what means her Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1669]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: None of my Department's publications is currently made available in any of these formats, and there have to date been no requests for this to be done.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Privy Council Office (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Council how many civil servants, of each grade, in the Privy Council Office were of Asian origin, on 5 May. [720]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: On 5 May 1997 there was one staff member of the Privy Council Office of Asian origin, at the grade of Personal Secretary, out of a total staff of 38.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Council what proposals she has to increase the number of ethnic minority employees in the Privy Council Office. [721]

Mrs. Taylor: There are currently two staff at the Privy Council Office of ethnic minority origin, out of a total staff of 38. My Department's policy in recruiting and promoting staff is to provide equality of opportunity to suitably qualified candidates, irrespective of their racial origin or religion.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the President of the Council if she will make it her policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if she will make a statement. [1670]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The Privy Council Office does not sponsor legislation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has described in his answer to the hon. Member the steps which the Government will be taking in pursuit of our manifesto commitment to establishing comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or at work.

Drugs Misuse

Mr. Spring: To ask the President of the Council how she proposes to tackle the rising incidence of drug misuse. [534]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The Government will appoint an anti-drugs supremo to co-ordinate our action against drugs across all Government departments and key agencies. She or he will report directly to me as Chairman of the Cabinet's co-ordinating committee on drugs misuse. One of the "drugs czar's" first tasks will be to review urgently the existing drugs strategy and put forward proposals for tackling the problem with renewed vigour. This will build on action already underway at both national and local level, including legislative proposals to break the links between drugs and crime, and the work of Drug Action Teams across the country.

WALES

Devolution

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what *(a)* financial and *(b)* other support the Welsh Office intends to give the organisation Senedd i Gymru for its yes campaign on devolution; and if he will make a statement. [1280]

Mr. Ron Davies: I do not intend to provide financial and other support to the organisation Senedd i Gymru.

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to set up, fund and support an official all-party organisation to campaign in favour of a yes vote in the devolution referendum; and if he will make a statement. [1279]

Mr. Davies: I have no plans to set up or fund an official all party organisation to campaign in favour of a yes vote on the Government's proposals for a Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the current powers and duties of the Secretary of State he assesses will remain his responsibility in the event of devolution. [1089]

Mr. Davies: I will continue to represent Welsh interests in Cabinet contributing to the formulation of the Government's policy and proposals for legislation. Details of the Government's proposals, including my role will be set out in the White Paper to be published in the summer.

Mr. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what budget has been allocated by his Department to support the Government's campaign for devolution.[1088]

Mr. Davies: The Welsh Office running cost and publicity budgets set for 1997–98 by the previous Government made no specific provision for expenditure related to devolution. Welsh Office budgets are being reviewed.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1661]

Mr. Ron Davies: Details of Welsh Office publications produced in formats other than normal print have been publicised through information releases to the media and through direct contact with relevant organisations, e.g. RNIB.

The Welsh Office has produced the following publications in braille; large print or audio cassettes. Some have been produced bi-lingually.

Council Tax—A guide to the New Tax for Local Government in Wales (braille, large print and audio tape)

Council Tax—Valuation and Banding (braille, large print and audio tape)

Council Tax—How to Appeal (braille, large print and audio tape)

Council Tax—Liability, Discounts and Exemptions (braille, large print and audio tape)

An Inspection of Services for the Visually Impaired in Gwynedd (large print and audio tape)

Published Information for Users and Carers and General Public—A Guide to Good Practice (large print)

Keep Warm, Keep Well (audio tape)

Code of Practice on Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (audio tape)

Charter for Higher Education for Wales (audio tape)

Charter for Further Education for Wales (audio tape)

Patients Charter for Wales (audio tape)

Parents Charters for Wales (audio tape)

Tenants Charter (audio tape)

A Brief guide to the Disability Discrimination Act for People with learning disabilities (large print and audio tape)

A consultation on Part M of the Building Regulations (audio tape)

The Mental Handicap Strategy Guidance (audio tape).

Public Bodies

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the running costs of each non-departmental public body in Wales in 1992; and if he will compare these in percentage terms with the current running costs of each body. [1235]

Mr. Ron Davies: The following table sets out the running costs outturn for 1992–93 for each NDPB, together with plans for 1997–98 and the percentage change. In some cases the comparisons between the two years are not straightforward. The running cost definition of the Welsh Development Agency, Development Board for Rural Wales, Wales Tourist Board, Cardiff Bay Development Corporation and the Land Authority for

Wales were rebased in the intervening period; and the Further and Higher Education Funding councils did not assume their full responsibilities until April 1993:

Advisory NDPBs and tribunals	*Outturn 1992–93 £*	*Plans 1997–98 £*	*Percentage change*
Environment Agency Advisory Committee for Wales	1,581	1,314	-16.8
Agriculture Dwelling House Advisory Committee	1,000	1,000	—
Hill Farming Advisory Sub-Committee	4,000	3,000	-25
Historical Buildings Council for Wales	12,688	15,000	+18.2
Ancient Monuments Board for Wales	5,341	8,000	+49.8
Local Government Boundary Committee	62,000	500,000	+706.4
Local Government Staff Commission	Not in existence in 1992	11,000	n/a
Welsh Council for Post Graduate Medical and Dental Education	5,411	5,500	+1.6
Welsh Scientific Advisory Committee	17,224	16,000	-7.1
Welsh Medical Committee	20,103	21,000	+4.5
Welsh Optical Committee	1,106	1,500	+35
Welsh Dental Committee	3,371	7,500	+122.5
Welsh Nursing and Midwifery Committee	3,657	8,000	+118.8
Welsh Pharmaceutical Committee	10,723	18,000	+67.9
Welsh Committee for Post Graduate Pharmaceutical Education	2,895	8,940	+208.8
Library and Information Services Council	9,000	13,000	+44.4
Place Names Advisory Committee	600	600	—
Welsh Industrial Development Advisory Board	57,342	53,000	-7.6
Welsh Committee on Drug and Alcohol Misuse	Not in existence in 1992	10,000	n/a
Valuation Tribunals	621,524	860,000	+38.3
Registered Inspectors Appeals Tribunal	Not in existence in 1992	10,000	n/a
Mental Health Review Tribunal	95,000	323,000	+240
Agricultural Lands Tribunal	6,000	5,000	-16.7
Rent Assessment Panel	189,600	163,500	-13.76
Agriculture Advisory Panel for Wales	8,500	4,500	-47

NDPB Running Costs

Executive NDPBs	*Outturn 1992–93 £*	*Plans 1997–98 £*	*Percentage change per cent.*
Welsh Development Agency	14,300,000	[2]20171000	[1]+41
Development Board for Rural Wales	3,276,000	[1]3580000	[1]+9
Wales Tourist Board	3,936,000	[1]3958000	[1]+0.5
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation	3,320,000	[1]4497000	[1]+35.4
Land Authority for Wales	1,796,000	[1]4497000	[1]+5.23
Countryside Council for Wales	8,500,000	8900000	+4.7
National Museums and Galleries of Wales	9,129,000	10452000	+14.5
National Library for Wales	4,188,000	4870000	+1.63
Sports Council for Wales	1,023,000	[1]995,000	[1]-2.7
Welsh Language Board	Not in existence in 1992	1,109,000	n/a
Arts Council for Wales	Not in existence in 1992	2,004,000	n/a
Housing for Wales	2,870,000	[2]2,770,000	-3.5
Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales	Not in existence in 1992	1,573,000	n/a
Welsh National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting	981,000	975,000	-0.6
Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales	919,000	1,125,000	+22.4

NDPB Running Costs

Executive NDPBs	*Outturn 1992–93 £*	*Plans 1997–98 £*	*Percentage change per cent.*
Higher Education Funding Council	500,000	1,616,000	+223
Further Education Funding Council	1,000,000	2,425,000	+142.5
Wales Youth Agency[2]	301,000	310,000	+3
Residual Body for Wales	Not in existence in 1992	920,700	n/a
Agriculture Wages Committee	2,000	3,286	+64.3

[1] Revised definition of Running Costs compared to 1992–93

[2] The Wales Youth Agency was an NDPB until 31 March 1997; since that date, it is a grant aided body.

Beef Farms

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit Pwll Farm, Trevddyn and Carreg y Llech Farm, Trevddyn, Alyn and Deeside, to meet beef farmers. [1306]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have no immediate plans to do so, but I have already had meetings with the NFU and the FUW and our discussions did include the problem currently facing the beef industry.

Transport Minor Works

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will review his funding policy for transport minor works schemes; and if he will make a statement. [1299]

Mr. Hain: Transport Grant is available for schemes costing over £5 million. Smaller projects are funded at individual local authorities' discretion from unhypothecated resources. I am currently reviewing these arrangements and anticipate that any changes will be introduced for the 1998–99 bidding round.

Ministerial Visit (Broughton)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a visit to *(a)* the Raytheon Jets Service Centre, Broughton, Flintshire and *(b)* British Aerospace, Broughton, Flintshire. [1266]

Mr. Ron Davies: My officials are in regular contact with both companies. I am delighted at their recent successes and congratulate my hon. Friend on his work in saving the Raytheon plant in his constituency. I hope to visit at a suitable opportunity.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1241]

Mr. Ron Davies: An assessment of the effect of the millennium date change has been undertaken. I do not expect there to be any major costs involved in ensuring that my Department's computer systems can cater for the year 2000.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Compensation Agency

Mr. Desmond Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Compensation Agency's Corporate Plan for 1997–98 to 1999–2000 and the Business Plan for 1997–98 will be published. [2154]

Mr. Ingram: The Compensation Agency's Corporate and Business Plans will be published today. The plans explain the Agency's business and organisation and set out assumptions about workloads and resources which underpin the plans and targets.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Chickens

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many chickens have been dead on arrival at United Kingdom poultry slaughter houses since 24 April. [1121]

Mr. Morley: On the basis that my hon. Friend is referring to 24 April 1996, the information requested is as follows:

	Total throughput	*Dead on arrival*	*Percentage*
Great Britain	695,243,052	[1]1,378,892	0.2
Northern Ireland	58,091,168	[2]154,657	0.3

[1] To 27 April 1997.
[2] To 24 March 1997.

Animal Exports

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pigs were included in the consignments exported on *(a)* 15 May and *(b)* 19 May; what factors led him on 16 May to issue a notice under the Welfare of Animals During Transport Order 1994 preventing the export from Dover of a consignment of pigs; what steps he plans to take to ensure regular compliance in the future with the health and welfare laws governing the export of live animals; and if he will make a statement. [1273]

Mr. Morley: A total of 2,919 pigs were exported on the MV Caroline on 15 May and 1,583 on 19 May. Officials delayed the 16 May consignment by serving a notice because they were not satisfied with the information given as to the destination. This is part of the Government's overall policy of applying the highest possible standards to this trade and of pressing the other Member States to do likewise.

The Government strongly prefer meat to be exported on the hook rather than on the hoof. Where animals are exported live, the public must have full confidence that the strictest possible welfare rules are being applied to this trade. We will not compromise on these standards.

A consultation letter has gone out to interested parties seeking suggestions and comments by 18 June. I have commissioned an urgent review of the arrangements for ensuring that animals are rested, fed, watered, cleared as fit and certified prior to export in accordance with the law.

BSE

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 21 May, *Official Report* columns *95-6*, (1) which of the typical selection of identified landfill sites, where checks in respect of ground water quality have been or will be carried out, have a chalk base; [1509]

(2) if the part of Beddingham landfill site where carcases of cattle infected by BSE were disposed of was lined to prevent seepage into the chalk below; what other classes of waste have been permitted for disposal in that section of the site; and what monitoring of that section of site has been carried out subsequent to the disposal therein of the carcases referred to; [1510]

(3) if Beddingham landfill site is one of the typical selection of identified landfill sites where checks in respect of ground water quality have been or will be carried out. [1511]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Environment Agency has responsibility for the safe regulation of landfill sites in England and Wales under Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Agency has advised that the Beddingham landfill site is licensed to accept industrial, commercial and household waste; there was no sub-division of the site to keep these different waste streams apart; and that the carcases landfilled there (fewer than 10) were deposited in an unlined area of the site with a chalk base.

The Environment Agency monitors ground water quality in the vicinity of licensed landfill sites to check for leachate contamination as part of their statutory duties. It is understood that there are ten boreholes at Beddingham where regular monitoring of groundwater is undertaken by the operators of the site.

The Agency has carried out a qualitative assessment of all the sites concerned taking into account the number of carcases buried, the degree of containment and the proximity of water sources. It has carried out a further more detailed quantitative assessment of a selection of sites. This includes a chalk based site but not Beddingham itself.

The Agency presented its quantitative assessment to the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee for comments. The Agency is preparing to publish the final results of the assessment very shortly. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make it her policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if she will make a statement. [1660]

Clare Short: This Department currently has a policy of equal opportunity but is developing an action plan to achieve equality of opportunity specifically for disabled staff.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the amounts of money Britain has given in overseas aid *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* as a percentage of gross domestic product in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [1882]

Clare Short: International comparisons of figures for official development assistance (oda) are normally presented in relation to gross national product on a calendar year basis. UK assistance between 1991 and 1995 (the latest year for which figures are available) was as follows:

	Real terms (million at 1995 prices)	*Oda/GNP (percentage)*
1991	2,044	0.32
1992	1,988	0.31
1993	2,029	0.31
1994	2,138	0.31
1995	2,000	0.28

The Government is firmly committed to working for a safer, more decent and environmentally stable world, and the eradication of poverty. As announced in The Queen's Speech, our development strategy will be set out in a White Paper to be published in the Autumn.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 5 June 1997

TREASURY

Revenue and Expenditure

Mr. Forth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the difference between total tax revenue and total public expenditure in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales for the current year and each of the subsequent two years. [643]

Mr. Darling: The table shows figures for general government receipts and expenditure in Scotland and Wales in 1994–95, the latest year for which figures are available. Estimates and forecasts for later years are not available. The estimates for England are derived as the residual from the published UK figures, after deducting figures for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

General Government Receipts (GGR), General Government Expenditure (GGE) and the General Government Borrowing Requirement (GGBR) in England, Scotland and Wales, 1994–95 (£ billion)

	GGR[1]	GGE[2]	GGBR[3]
England	210.1	237.6	27.5
Scotland	22.1	30.3	8.2
Wales	9.9	15.6	5.7

Notes:

[1] Figures for GGR exclude North Sea revenues, which are ascribed to the Continental Shelf.

[2] Excluding privatisation proceeds.

[3] Excluding North Sea revenues and privatisation proceeds.

Source:

The figures for Scotland and Wales were published in "Government Expenditure and Revenue" for Scotland and Wales, respectively. The figures for England are derived by residual from the UK figures, taking into account the estimates for Northern Ireland.

Value Added Tax

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the United Kingdom's entitlement to levy VAT at zero rates ended; what powers the Government are exercising to continue zero rates; and if he will seek an assurance from the Commission that it will not challenge these powers in the European Court. [975]

Dawn Primarolo: The United Kingdom is entitled to continue applying its existing VAT zero rates. Our zero rates are expressly provided for in EC law under Article 28(2)(a) of the Sixth VAT Directive. This provision is linked to the duration of the 'transitional period', but this continues automatically until such time as any 'definitive' VAT regime is introduced, which would require the unanimous agreement of all Member States. In light of this there would be little to be gained from seeking any assurance from the Commission on the issue.

Windfall Levy

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement regarding the effect of the proposed windfall tax on utilities which have never been in public ownership. [1644]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce details of the windfall levy in his Budget statement.

Sir George Young: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* the privatised train operating companies, *(b)* Railtrack, *(c)* the rolling stock companies, *(d)* bus companies, *(e)* airports and *(f)* ports fall within his public definition of companies liable to a windfall tax. [1508]

Mr. Robinson: The Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce details of the windfall levy in his Budget statement.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the individual companies which he assesses to have made excess profits since they were privatised. [1850]

Mr. Robinson *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce details of the windfall levy in his Budget statement.

Mr. Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of how the levels of investment and employment in the utilities will be affected by a windfall levy. [685]

Mr. Robinson: The Government will take all relevant considerations into account in designing the windfall levy; to this end, we have invited representations from companies on the technical operation of the levy and are consulting the regulators.

Ministerial Offices (Refurbishment)

Ms Keeble: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent on the refurbishment of ministerial offices in the Treasury between 1992 and 1997. [1800]

Mrs. Liddell: No refurbishment work other than standard redecorations has been undertaken on ministerial offices in the last five years. The cost of decorating Ministers' offices is accounted for along with all other redecoration work in the Treasury and could be separated out only at disproportionate cost.

Payroll Donations (Charities)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend tax concessions on payroll donations to charities to people in receipt of company pensions. [1700]

Dawn Primarolo: Company pensions are taxed through the PAYE systems. Tax deductible donations can be made from them so long as the payroll operator is prepared to make the necessary arrangements with an agency charity.

Court of the Bank of England

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what ways the Court of the Bank of England will be

reformed to enable it to take into account the full range of industrial and business views within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [1868]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The Chancellor said in his 6 May letter to the Governor of the Bank of England that the Court will be representative of the whole of the United Kingdom. The non-executive members will be appointed for their expertise and will be drawn widely from industry, commerce and finance.

PRIME MINISTER

Referendums

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the cost to public funds of the two referendums provided by the Referendums (Scotland and Wales) Bill. [1636]

The Prime Minister: The estimated cost of the referendums will be up to £8 million, of which £5 million will be for Scotland, and up to £3 million for Wales.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Prime Minister what actions the Government will take to implement the decision of the European Commission of Human Rights in respect of legal rights of British nuclear test veterans to obtain war pensions and compensation for radiation-linked illnesses. [1916]

The Prime Minister: The European Commission of Human Rights has referred two cases relating to British nuclear test veterans to the European Court of Human Rights for decision. The cases will be heard in November 1997 and the Government will contest the cases because we do not agree that the lack of contemporaneous yield and radiation records prevented nuclear test veterans from getting a fair hearing before the Pensions Appeal Tribunal. The studies of the health of the test veterans, conducted by the National Radiological Protection Board and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, concluded that participation in the nuclear weapons testing programme had had no long term detectable effect on the veterans expectation of life or on their risk of developing cancer.

Council of Ministers (Stability Pact)

Mr. Cash: To ask the Prime Minister if he will continue the practice of previous Governments of treating political agreement to legislative proposals in the Council of Ministers as equivalent to final agreement, with particular reference to the stability pact. [1925]

The Prime Minister: Yes.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Representation (Tehran)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the normal level of current United Kingdom diplomatic representation in Tehran. [1207]

Mr. Fatchett: There are 15 full-time UK diplomatic staff in Tehran. Our Embassy is headed by a Charge d'Affaires.

Iranian Diplomatic Representation (London)

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the permitted level of Iranian diplomatic representation in London. [1209]

Mr. Fatchett: Iranian diplomatic representation in London is restricted to 15 full time diplomatic staff.

Iranian Dissidents

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken following a German court's judgment that the Iranian Government were responsible for the Mykonos cafe killing of Iranian dissidents in Germany. [1208]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The EU immediately issued a statement condemning the evidence of official Iranian involvement in these murders and withdrew its Heads of Mission for consultation. The UK associated itself fully with the Declaration issued by the EU General Affairs Council on 29 April 1997. This confirmed that there was no basis for the continuation of the Critical Dialogue between the EU and Iran. Measures were also adopted on ministerial visits, arms sales, visas and intelligence personnel. The EU council decided to keep the relationship with Iran under close review.

Treaty of Rome (Prosecutions)

Mr. Radice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times each European Union member state was prosecuted in the European Court of Justice under the terms of article 169 of the treaty of Rome in 1995 and 1996. [1885]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The enforcement of Community law—commenced under Article 169 of the EC Treaty—has a number of stages which can take more than one year to complete. The latest figures are contained in the Commission's Thirteenth Annual Report on Monitoring the Application of Community Law (1995) which is in the Libraries of the House. The table below from the report, details established infringements by stage of proceeding and Member State for 1991–1995, giving an indicative overall picture. The report for 1996 will be published soon. It will be deposited in the Libraries of the House when it becomes available.

Table 2.1: Established infringements—Classified by stage of proceedings and Member State

	Article 169 letters				
Member State	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
B	71	110	98	77	80
DK	52	46	66	57	42
D	60	97	120	90	92
EL	88	112	125	96	113
E	79	129	107	86	81
F	54	113	105	90	97
IRL	59	87	91	70	67
I	115	138	108	102	114
L	64	97	91	64	71
NL	62	75	75	73	59
A	—	—	—	—	4

Table 2.1: Established infringements—Classified by stage of proceedings and Member State

Article 169 letters

Member State	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
P	86	116	125	96	115
FIN	—	—	—	—	2
S	—	—	—	—	2
UK	63	97	98	73	77
Total	853	1,217	1,209	974	1,016

Reasoned opinions

Member State	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
B	46	22	26	41	19
DK	3	4	3	14	1
D	13	18	35	66	25
EL	48	30	41	85	26
E	30	39	28	53	15
F	15	10	39	49	17
IRL	27	13	25	47	3
I	76	40	49	60	36
L	35	21	29	36	9
NL	23	16	22	20	4
A	—	—	—	—	0
P	84	22	40	54	22
FIN	—	—	—	—	0
S	—	—	—	—	0
UK	11	13	15	21	15
Total	411	248	352	546	192

Referrals to Court

Member State	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
B	8	6	7	10	6
DK	1	0	0	0	0
D	1	5	4	5	10
EL	9	4	4	17	12
E	2	5	5	9	6
F	4	1	2	8	6
IRL	3	9	0	12	6
I	24	11	6	12	17
L	4	14	11	6	3
NL	7	5	5	4	0
A	—	—	—	—	0
P	2	1	0	5	4
FIN	—	—	—	—	0
S	—	—	—	—	0
UK	0	3	0	1	2
Total	65	64	44	89	72

Defence Exports

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 22 May, *Official Report*, column *135*, if he will publish a detailed list stating each of the criteria which will be the subject of his review, a list of those countries where concerns have been expressed that United Kingdom supplied defence equipment has been used for internal repression; and if he will define what he means by international stability. [2225]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The existing criteria against which officials consider licence applications for the export of conventional arms are contained in this Department's guidance booklet for desk officers, a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Specific concerns have been expressed in the media and elsewhere about a range of countries where UK defence equipment may have been used for internal repression. The review will not, however, focus on individual countries. Its purpose is to meet our commitment not to permit the sale of arms to any regime which might use them for internal repression or international aggression. It is the latter which requires officials to consider implications of a proposed export of arms for international stability, taking into account inter alia the effect on regional tension and stability and any existing armed conflict.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will propose the enfranchisement of the Gibraltarians in the European Union. [2015]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We are aware of the strength of feeling in Gibraltar about this issue. But there are real legal and practical difficulties in the way of any change in the present position on voting in the European Parliament elections.

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 June, *Official Report*, column *82*, if he will seek at the European Council to free Gibraltar airport from Spanish-imposed constraints. [2092]

Mr. Henderson: The principal purpose of the European Council is to conclude the IGC. It is not an appropriate forum in which to raise the issue of Gibraltar airport.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Conduct of Defence by Accused Persons

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department in what percentage of cases heard in court the accused conducted his or her own defence in the last three years. [1939]

Mr. Hoon: The information requested is not available for cases heard in the magistrates' courts. The proportion of all defendants indicted for trial in the Crown Court who were not legally represented (either under legal aid or privately) was 0.8 per cent. in 1994, 0.7 per cent. in 1995 and 0.8 per cent. in 1996. Of those defendants in cases for sentence in the Crown Court, 15 per cent. were not legally represented (either under legal aid or privately) in 1994. The corresponding figures for 1995 and 1996 were also 15 per cent. Of those appellants who appealed to the Crown Court against their conviction and/or sentence in the magistrates' courts, 38 per cent. were not legally represented either through legal aid or privately in 1994. In 1995 and 1996, the figures were 38 per cent. and 34 per cent. respectively.

Unpursued Legal Matters

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what estimates he has of the number of people who failed to pursue legal matters in the courts on account of their financial situation in the last three years. [1940]

Mr. Hoon: I have no such estimates, and I do not see how useful estimates could be made. Many factors may affect a decision on whether or not to litigate. For example, people have different priorities for how they spend their money, and other factors such as uncertainty about the outcome and costs of the case, and their willingness to undergo the stress of litigation will often affect their decisions.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what advice his Department offers to people who neither qualify for legal aid nor have sufficient private means to make use of the justice system. [1941]

Mr. Hoon: For certain proceedings a person may enter into a conditional fee agreement whereby a solicitor can take a case on a "no win no fee" basis. At present conditional fees are available for personal injury cases, insolvency actions and cases before the European Court of Human Rights. I shall shortly be considering the possibility of extending conditional fees to other areas. In addition legal expenses insurance may be available for some types of civil dispute.

Legal Aid

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to change his Department's policy on eligibility for legal aid. [1942]

Mr. Hoon: There are no plans at present to change eligibility for legal aid. However there is to be a review of the proposed reforms of the civil justice system and legal aid. We will consider the scope for changes to eligibility for legal aid in the light of the outcome of the review.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to widen eligibility for legal aid to those defending libel actions; and if he will make a statement. [1944]

Mr. Hoon: There are no plans to extend the scope of the legal aid scheme to include defending libel actions. Successive Governments have taken the view that the outcomes of such cases are uniquely difficult to foresee and that even if the general mechanisms against unmeritorious proceedings could be strengthened in some way, they would still not provide an effective safeguard against the potential waste of public money.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Animal Experimentation

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps were taken to ensure that the dogs supplied from non-designated sources in the United Kingdom in 1995 for use in scientific procedures were not ex-pets, strays or stolen. [1839]

Mr. George Howarth: The provenance was checked as far as possible and the legal owner's consent obtained in each case.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the acute lethal toxicity tests in Table 12, column 2 of the 1995 Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals in Great Britain were (1) LD50/LC50 tests, (2) other acute lethal tests and (3) sub-acute, repeat-dose lethal tests. [1739]

Mr. Howarth: Column 2 of table 12 reports aggregated totals by species for acute LD50, LC50 and other acute lethal tests. Licensees are not required to record in their statistical returns which of these tests they carried out. A breakdown into test type is therefore not centrally available. Sub-acute toxicity tests (which may include repeat dosages but which are not necessarily lethality tests) are recorded in column 5 of table 12.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many personal callers were there to the public inquiry desk at each branch of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate on 6 May. [1815]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 6 May, the number of applicants at the public enquiry offices of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate was:

	Number
Belfast	4
Birmingham	56
Croydon Public Enquiry Office	705
Croydon Asylum Screening Unit	328
Glasgow	24
Liverpool	31

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1684]

Mr. Straw: My Department will be contributing to the consultations, including discussions about the definition of disability, referred to by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Employment in his reply of 4 June, *Official Report*, column 190. It would not be appropriate to pre-judge the outcome of that work.

Immigration (Primary Purpose Rule)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of the primary purpose rule in immigration cases. [2625]

Mr. Straw: Following our manifesto commitment, we are acting to end the primary purpose rule because it is arbitrary, unfair and ineffective and has penalised genuine marriages, divided families and unnecessarily increased the administrative burden on the immigration system. The rule has also placed British citizens resident here at a

disadvantage compared with other European Union nationals resident in Britain—to whom no primary purpose rule has applied.

Applicants under the rule had to prove a negative both before the entry clearance officer and on appeal. But, even where applicants lost their appeal, they would then be allowed in where there was a child with right of abode in the United Kingdom or where the marriage had lasted five years. It is also very doubtful that this inherently ineffective and unfair rule has worked to filter out those who sought to cheat the system. This question is not therefore about numbers, but about fairness.

I am determined to build an immigration and asylum system that is fairer, faster and firmer. Ending this rule will allow resources to be focused on the other requirements of the rules, which are known to be fair, effective and enforceable. These include:

first, showing that the marriage is genuine: the couple must intend to live together permanently as husband and wife: and the marriage must be subsisting. In other words, it must not be a marriage of convenience;

secondly, both parties to the marriage must have met; and,

thirdly, both parties must demonstrate that they can maintain and accommodate themselves and any dependants without recourse to public funds.

The burden of proof in these cases will remain on the applicant. In addition, couples will continue to be subject to a 12 month probationary period, at the end of which they must show again that their marriage is genuine. This will be firmly enforced.

An amendment to the Rules will be made today. Entry clearance officers are being instructed not to refuse entry clearance applications where the refusal depends solely on the primary purpose rule. Similar instructions are being issued to staff in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. Home Office Presenting Officers are being instructed not to oppose cases on appeal where the refusal was based wholly on the primary purpose rule and the rule will not apply to outstanding applications. However, if an appellant still decides to proceed on his own initiative, he will still have to prove his case to the adjudicator, even though the Presenting Officer will not formally oppose the appeal. Those who have had their case and their appeal refused will be entitled to apply again, on payment of an apppropriate fee.

DEFENCE

Arms Supplies (Central Africa)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military equipment has been supplied to the central African region from companies in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the Isle of Man, *(c)* the Channel Islands and *(d)* other United Kingdom dependent territories in the last five years. [1054]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence does not hold details of military equipment supplied, other than those which are provided voluntarily by companies for the purposes of the annual return to the UN Arms Register; no exports to Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Central African Republic or Congo, have been included in the UK's return to the UN Register in the period 1992–96.

Details of export licences issued to companies seeking to supply controlled military goods to these countries are held by the DTI in respect of companies based in the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man. Details of export licences issued by the Channel Islands and UK dependent territories are held by the authorities there. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The British Government have been fully committed to both the UN embargo imposed in May 1994 banning the supply of arms to Rwanda and the 1993 European Union embargo on the export of arms to Zaire. Press allegations were made in November 1996 that British companies might have been involved in the supply of arms to Rwandan extremists in 1994, but there was no evidence to suggest that arms had been exported from the UK. The Government established an inter-departmental committee to examine rigorously our procedures in relation to the trafficking in arms, to determine whether there had been a gap in our controls. A copy of the Committee's report was placed in the Library of the House in December last year.

Equipment Exhibition (Farnborough)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the countries from which buyers *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be invited to the Royal Navy and British Army Equipment Exhibition being held at Farnborough from 31 August to 5 September. [1766]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The purpose of the Royal Navy and British Army Equipment Exhibition, which this year takes place jointly at Portsmouth and Farnborough, is to show a wide range of British defence equipment to representatives of countries with whom we have friendly relations. The equipment on display ranges from British built ships at one end of the scale to such items as communications equipment and Air Defence Radar at the other end of the scale.

The Government takes seriously its commitment to Article 51 of the United Nations charter which affirms the right of nations to self defence. Export licences for equipment on display will, however, be granted only on a case by case basis where the Government is satisfied that such equipment will be used neither for external aggression nor for internal repression. The Government is currently reviewing the criteria under which export licences will be issued.

The following countries have been invited to send delegations to RNBAEE 97:

Australia
Austria
Bahrain
Botswana
Brazil
Brunei
Canada
Chile
Czech Republic
Denmark
Ecuador
Egypt
Finland

France
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Israel
Italy
Japan
Jordan
Kenya
Kuwait
Malaysia
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
PRC
Qatar
Republic of Korea
Romania
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
Slovenia
South Africa
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Thailand
Turkey
UAE
USA
Venezuela
Vietnam
Zimbabwe.

Animal Experimentation

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those of his Department's establishments at which animal experiments are conducted indicating how many animal experiments were conducted at each in each year since 1993. [1876]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. John Spellar, dated 5 June 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about those of his department's establishments at which animal experiments are conducted indicating how many animal experiments were conducted at each in each year since 1993 as the matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA).

Two DERA sites currently conduct animal experiments, Porton Down and Alverstoke. In 1993 the former RAF Institute of Aviation Medicine based at Farnborough, concluded a programme of work with animals. The number of animal experiments conducted at each in each calendar year since 1993 are in the table below.

	Porton Down	*Alverstoke*	*IAM*	*Total*
1993	6,697	166	12	6,875
1994	7,416	238	—	7,654
1995	8,747	167	—	8,914
1996	11,097	124	—	11,221

In answering this question we have discovered a small statistical error in the numbers quoted for 1993 in a previous answer to you in 1995 (PQ 5852). The number quoted above is the correct figure and I can only apologise for the earlier error. For ease of reference the above number for 1993 is 79 greater than the one given earlier.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to review the legislation relating to claims by former service personnel for compensation for asbestos-related diseases contracted before 1987. [1895]

Dr. John Reid: I have no plans to review the legislation regarding the entitlement of Service personnel to common law compensation from my Department for injuries received before 1987.

National Service

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce an official award for national service; and if he will make a statement. [2140]

Mr. Spellar: National servicemen were eligible to receive the full range of campaign stars and medals available to the Armed Forces, subject to individual qualification.

Service between 1939 and 1945 was recognised by the 1939–45 Star, 1939–45 War Medal, the Defence Medal and the Campaign Stars for the various campaigns in which they served.

Similarly, servicemen called up between 1946 and 1963 were eligible for the various clasps to the General Service Medal for the operations in which they served for example, Palestine, Malaya or Cyprus, and those who served in Korea were also eligible for the campaign medal and the United Nations Service Medal Korea.

There are no plans to institute any additional awards for service during the above periods.

HMS Ark Royal

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy that HMS Ark Royal is refitted at Rosyth. [1881]

Dr. John Reid: I can confirm that HMS Ark Royal is included in the programme of surface ship refitting which, subject to satisfactory price and contractual agreement, has been allocated to Babcock Rosyth Defence Limited as part of the recent privatisation of Rosyth Royal Dockyard.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if intermediate level wastes arising from the reprocessing of nuclear fuel from overseas will be retained in the United Kingdom; [1780]

(2) what plans he has to commission research into a long-term management proposal for radioactive wastes which incorporates retrievability. [1786]

Mr. Meacher: The Government is considering implications for radioactive waste management policy of the former Secretary of State's dismissal of the United Kingdom Nirex Ltd.'s appeal against refusal of planning permission for a Rock Characterisation Facility at Sellafield. These include the return to the country of origin of intermediate-level waste generated by reprocessing of foreign spent fuel.

The previous Government's policy of "waste substitution" required BNFL to return intermediate-level waste to its foreign reprocessing customers (rather than a much smaller volume but radiologically equivalent amount of high-level waste) should the Nirex repository not be established by the time BNFL is contractually obliged to return the waste—i.e. 25 years after they are generated. It is unlikely that a repository could become operational within that timescale.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on Nirex's plan to establish a dump on the Stanford training area, Thetford. [1954]

Mr. Meacher: Following the dismissal of Nirex's appeal against refusal of planning permission for a Rock Characterisation Facility at Sellafield, I understand that Nirex has no plans to investigate any other sites.

MOX Fuel

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research capacity is available to the Environment Agency to evaluate the transmutation capacity of MOX fuel fabrication. [1784]

Mr. Meacher: Partitioning and transmutation of long lived radionuclides is under review internationally as a means of treating radioactive waste. A senior member of the Environment Agency is involved in a Nuclear Energy Agency working group which is assessing the potential of such techniques. The Department of the Environment is also maintaining a watching brief on international developments in this field.

Basking Sharks

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will apply in full Section V of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to basking sharks; and if he will make a statement. [2226]

Ms Angela Eagle: Public consultations on the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's recommendation that the basking shark be afforded full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and recommendations concerning 33 other species, took place between January and April. Responses received during the exercise are being considered.

It is premature to indicate if the basking shark will be afforded full protection until Ministers have considered all representations. Ministers hope to make a decision in the summer.

Rough Sleepers Initiative

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funding decisions have been reached for the 12 areas offered assistance under the third phase of the rough sleepers initiative. [2187]

Ms Armstrong: The Government's aim is to ensure that there is no necessity for people to sleep rough. I am therefore delighted to announce £17.2 million funding under the Rough Sleepers Initiative and the Rough Sleepers Revenue Fund for voluntary sector organisations and housing associations in Bath, Bournemouth, Brighton, Cambridge, Ealing, Exeter, Leicester, Manchester, Nottingham, Oxford, Richmond upon Thames and West London, to alleviate the difficulties faced by people sleeping rough in those areas.

Temporary and permanent accommodation, including specialist accommodation for people suffering mental ill health and drink and drugs misuse problems, will be funded in Brighton and West London. Outreach and resettlement workers will be funded in all 12 areas, and organisations in some of the 12 areas will also receive funding for additional hostel staff.

I am also particularly pleased that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health has confirmed that the Department of Health will be contributing nearly £3 million to the initiative. As part of the expansion of the Homeless Mentally Ill Initiative beyond central London, nearly £2 million will be allocated to local authorities over the next three years to provide extra services for people sleeping rough who have mental health problems; £2.5 million will be provided in 1997–98 under the Drug and Alcohol Specific Grant to 81 projects, with £740,000 of that going to 21 new projects providing services to people sleeping rough who have alcohol and drug misuse

problems. The co-ordination of funding between the Departments of the Environment and Health will reinforce the partnership approach which is a key to the success of strategies to help people sleeping rough.

My Department and the Housing Corporation are writing today to each of the voluntary sector organisations and housing associations who submitted a bid for funding to let them know what decisions have been reached.

My Department, in conjunction with the Department of Health, has also written today to the relevant local authorities explaining the funding allocations in detail. The Government welcomes the part played by local authorities and voluntary sector organisations in preparing strategies aimed at tackling rough sleeping and in working up the bids for funding.

I have considered a number of proposals to increase staffing in existing hostels for people sleeping rough. It is clear that more thought needs to be given to the co-ordination of provision in some areas and I have decided, therefore, to invite the local authorities in Bath, Bournemouth, Cambridge, Ealing, Exeter, Nottingham, Oxford and Richmond upon Thames to work with local hostel providers to develop further proposals to ensure that provision meets the needs of people sleeping rough in those areas. There will be a further opportunity for organisations in those areas to apply for additional hostel staff later in the year.

Earlier this year, my Department produced guidance to enable local authorities to evaluate the extent of rough sleeping in their areas and develop strategies to ensure that there is no necessity for people to sleep rough. Ian Brady, deputy Chief Executive of Centrepoint, has been seconded to the Department to promote the guidance and encourage the development of local strategies. We will consider offering funding to support local strategies in further areas where major rough sleeping problems are identified. Mr. Brady is also chairing a Rough Sleepers Forum of homelessness charities to help co-ordinate national efforts to tackle rough sleeping.

A list of the schemes being offered funding today has been placed in the House library.

TRANSPORT

Manchester Airport (Environmental Protest)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what has been the cost to public funds to date of the actions in respect of environmental activists opposing developments at Manchester Airport; and if he will make a statement. [2012]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The expense being incurred by the Under-Sheriff of Cheshire in removing the protesters from the site of the second runway at Manchester Airport is being met by the airport company and the contractors, without cost to public funds. The additional cost to Cheshire Constabulary of the policing operation at the site as at 17 April, the latest date for which information is available, was £111,000. The additional cost to Greater Manchester Police as at 30 May is estimated to be £274,000. There is in addition the cost of court hearings, although fees are payable towards that cost.

Integrated Transport Policy

Mr. Singh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he intends to take forward the Government's commitments to develop an integrated transport policy to fight congestion and pollution. [2626]

Mr. Prescott: Further to my replies to the House on Tuesday, I have today launched a fundamental review of transport policy to provide an integrated transport system which meets the environmental and transport needs of all regions of the country for today and the future. The review will look at both the short term and the longer term actions that are necessary to deliver an integrated system.

The review will encompass the key areas of transport and examine transport's relationship with the economy in general and with the many environmental issues which surround it. The review will be overseen by a Ministerial team drawn from both the Transport and Environmental Departments and chaired by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport. He and I are determined that this review will be conducted in an open and consultative way which will provide opportunity for those with an interest in transport to input their views to the process, and wherever possible, become directly involved in the development of policy.

My aim is to publish a long term strategy White Paper next Spring which will provide a sustainable framework for decision making during the remainder of this Parliament, the next and the years beyond that. Critically it will set interim objectives for the remainder of this Parliament, against which to judge our progress. Publication of the White Paper will mark the completion of the initial analytical, goal setting and consultation phase in the development of an integrated transport policy. But there will then be a rolling programme of action, involving both central and local government, transport operators and others across all regions to make that policy a reality.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Animal Exports

Mr. Etherington: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food where all the procedures performed by the local veterinary inspectors in connection with export health certification of the pigs exported from Dover on 15 May were carried out; if he will indicate whether these were places at which export health certification could properly be carried out under the terms of directive 64/432/EEC; how many of the pigs were *(a)* dead and *(b)* injured on arrival at Dover; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the report made by the member of his veterinary staff who accompanied the pigs on the sea crossing from Dover. [1272]

Mr. Morley: With the exception of one lorry load, the export health certification which accompanied the pigs on the sailing of the MV Caroline on 15 May was completed at their farms of origin in accordance with the rules laid down in Directive 64/432/EEC. In order to ensure the correct identity of the pigs transported, animal health certification for one lorry load was finalised at Dover. Two of the pigs transported to Dover were found to be

dead on arrival. Two others were found to be unfit to continue their journey and were not exported. The appropriate local authorities are being asked to consider whether prosecution would be warranted in relation to any aspects of the consignments of 15 and 16 May.

I have seen the report of the veterinarian who accompanied the pigs on their journey. I do not propose to place it in the Library. As a general principle, it is important for the proper enforcement of the rules that frank and candid reports are available for discussion within government and between government and the enforcement authorities. Such reports may also be used as part of legal proceedings where there is evidence of non-compliance. These purposes would be undermined if the practice were to publish reports such as this. They are covered by exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which enables the confidentiality of internal opinion, advice and recommendations to Ministers to be protected.

BSE

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he will take in the light of the EU Commission's statement that other member states are not taking enough precautions against risks of BSE in cattle or sheep and the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee's latest advice. [2624]

Dr. John Cunningham: In August 1996 the previous Government introduced a ban on the consumption of the heads of sheep and goats, following a recommendation from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee which had considered whether BSE could exist naturally in sheep. The Committee had also advised that the Government should continue to consider this issue further with its EU partners and implement a programme of further research.

Discussions took place during the latter part of 1996 in the European Union. The Commission proposed EU-wide controls on the use of spleen of all sheep and the brain and spinal cord of sheep which were more than about a year old, based on checking the number of permanent incisor teeth of the sheep. Unfortunately, despite support from the United Kingdom and a few other countries, the majority of Member States rejected this proposal.

I have raised this issue again with Commissioners Fischler and Bonino. The Commission announced on 14 May that it would be making further proposals.

In the light of this SEAC have reconsidered the question. There is still no scientific evidence indicating that there is any BSE in the national sheep population. But SEAC has recommended that it would be prudent for the Government to take early action if Community-wide measures are not agreed quickly, to extend controls, as proposed by the European Commission, to the spinal cord of sheep more than a year old—which account for around a sixth of annual consumption of sheepmeat in the UK—and to the spleen of all sheep. Similar action has already been taken by the Irish, French and Dutch Governments. This is a precautionary measure, designed to ensure that if BSE has been transmitted to sheep, all reasonable steps are taken to avoid any possible risks to consumers no matter how remote.

On the basis of the advice from SEAC, which I am placing in the Library of the House, the Government is today opening consultations on legislation which would extend the existing controls on the heads of all sheep and goats to the spleen, and would require the removal of spinal cord of sheep and goats with at least one permanent incisor erupted (the most practical means of ageing sheep over one year old). It would also ban the use of the vertebral column of sheep and goats in the production of mechanically recovered meat.

The SEAC statement also recommends reinforcing the existing arrangements for scrapie surveillance. The Government's intention is to reinforce the existing legal requirement on farmers to notify all cases of scrapie by providing new powers for the compulsory slaughter of affected animals, with payment of compensation, and by initiating a survey of brains from abattoirs and a postal survey of farms. The results of these surveys will be published. We are today opening consultation on this compulsory slaughter and compensation scheme.

Research into the epidemiology of the disease in sheep and goats is now under way. The new measures will significantly aid this research by providing further incentives for reporting disease, and additional material for research. In addition sheep are currently being selected from New Zealand, one of the few countries generally accepted as being free of scrapie, for use in a number of key long-term experiments. These sheep will provide a valuable resource for future work on scrapie.

The SEAC statement also includes advice on imported cattle. SEAC have advised that action should be taken to extend specified bovine material (SBM) controls to imported central nervous system (CNS) tissues or bovine material containing them. At present the legal requirement for the heads, spinal cord and certain other tissues of cattle to be removed from the food and animal feed chain, prohibited for use in pharmaceutical, cosmetic and medical products and disposed of under controlled conditions, applies only to carcases of bovine animals which have died or been slaughtered in the United Kingdom. The Government is opening consultation on proposals which would mean that the requirement to remove and dispose of specified tissues would apply not only to such carcases but also to bovine material which has been imported into the UK.

Beef Premium Claims

Mr. Terry Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action is being taken to recover overpayments of aid to beef producers based on premium claims in 1996. [2690]

Dr. John Cunningham: Regulation (EC) No.1357/96, the subject of Explanatory Memorandum 7811/96 of 3 June 1996, was cleared by the Select Committee on European Legislation on 5 June 1996 and adopted by the Council of Ministers on 8 July 1996. It contained a range of special measures to assist beef producers and included provision for supplementary payments to producers pro rata to their entitlement to subsidies under the Beef Special Premium and Suckler Cow Premium schemes in the 1996 scheme years. Provisional payments could however be based on 1995 claims so as to provide urgent financial support. At the time of payment if was made clear to producers that adjustment would follow to reflect

the position relating to 1996 subsidy claims. Beef producers who are being paid these subsidies on fewer animals in 1996 than in 1995 will be required to repay the supplement relating to the difference in numbers. Wherever possible, such overpayments will be deducted from balance payments due under the 1996 beef schemes. All monies recovered under this exercise will be re-distributed to those beef producers who qualified for subsidies on more animals in the 1996 scheme years than in 1995.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure that his Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if he will make a statement. [1242]

Mr. Dewar: A year 2000 project compliance programme is underway within The Scottish Office with the objective of identifying and ensuring the correct operation of all critical systems by 31 December 1998.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1676]

Mr. Galbraith: I refer the hon. Member to the Answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on 4 June 1997.

I will ensure that the views of disability organisations in Scotland are sought during the consultation process and that policies, including the definition of disability, are developed in partnership with interested parties.

Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the value of hill livestock compensatory allowance payments *(a)* in the last financial year and *(b)* in 1993. [1372]

Mr. Chisholm: The total value of Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance (HLCA) payments made in Scotland for *(a)* and *(b)* above was as follows:

Total expenditure

	£ million
(a) 1996–97 financial year	40.131
(b) 1993 calendar year	50.862

The values of HLCA headage payment rates in each of the scheme years which relate to the 1993 calendar year and the 1996–97 financial year are as follows:

Headage rates

	Scheme year 1993 £	1996 £	1997 £
Severely disadvantaged LFA land			
Non-HIE			
Specially qualified flock	6.50	5.75	5.75
Qualified flock	3.60	3.00	3.00
Hill cow	63.30	47.50	97.50
HIE			
Specially qualified flock	7.14	6.39	6.39
Qualified flock	3.60	3.00	3.00
Hill cow			
'A' grade land	66.35	50.55	103.76
'B' grade land	74.89	59.09	121.29
'C' grade land	79.16	63.36	[1]130.05
Disadvantaged LFA land			
Sheep	2.86	2.65	2.65
Cow	31.65	23.75	69.75

[1]Awaiting EU approval.

Highlands and Islands University

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what initiatives he plans to progress the development of a Highlands and Islands university; and what funding will be given by the Scottish Office. [1373]

Mr. Wilson: Good progress has already been made towards the creation of a University of the Highlands and Islands. Planned provision for the UHI Project in 1997–98 is £5 million. This is in addition to the £1.3 million which was made available last year. I shall keep under review the general requirements for the Project in future taking account of any implications arising from the report of the Dearing Committee on Higher Education when it is published.

Consultant Post Vacancies

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many vacancies for consultants there are in the NHS in Scotland; how many of these posts have been vacant for six months or more; and if he will indicate these per NHS trust. [1374]

Mr. Galbraith: The latest available information is contained in the table:

Hospital medical and dental consultant vacancies as at 30 September 1996

Trust/Health Board	Total vacancies	Posts vacant more than six months
South Ayrshire Hospitals NHS Trust	4	1
North Ayrshire and Arran NHS Trust	1	—
Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care NHS Trust	5	5

Hospital medical and dental consultant vacancies as at 30 September 1996

Trust/Health Board	*Total vacancies*	*Posts vacant more than six months*
Borders General Hospital NHS Trust	6	1
Royal Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust	4	2
Inverclyde Royal NHS Trust	8	5
Renfrewshire Healthcare NHS Trust	6	4
Lomond Healthcare NHS Trust	4	1
Argyll and Bute NHS Trust	1	1
Queen Margaret Hospital NHS Trust	3	2
Fife Healthcare NHS Trust	2	1
Kirkcaldy Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	3	1
Southern General Hospital NHS Trust	2	1
Yorkhill NHS Trust	5	2
Victoria Infirmary NHS Trust	2	1
Glasgow Royal Infirmary University NHS Trust	7	—
Stobhill NHS Trust	1	—
Greater Glasgow Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	9	3
Glasgow Dental Hospital and School NHS Trust	1	—
Raigmore Hospital NHS Trust	5	4
Caithness and Sutherland NHS Trust	3	1
Highland Communities NHS Trust	2	2
Monklands and Bellshill Hospitals NHS Trust	12	4
Law Hospital NHS Trust	10	9
Hairmyres and Stonehouse Hospitals NHS Trust	2	2
Lanarkshire Healthcare NHS Trust	12	12
Aberdeen Royal Hospitals NHS Trust	10	5
Grampian Healthcare NHS Trust	14	4
Moray Health Services NHS Trust	3	—
Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh NHS Trust	9	9
Edinburgh Sick Children's NHS Trust	2	2
Western General Hospitals NHS Trust	6	1
Edinburgh Healthcare NHS Trust	1	1
Dundee Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	2	—
Perth and Kinross Healthcare NHS Trust	2	1
Stirling Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	2	2
Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary NHS Trust	6	2
Central Scotland Healthcare NHS Trust	5	1
Western Isles HB Headquarters	3	2
Dumfries and Galloway Acute and Maternity Hospitals NHS Trust	5	5
Dumfries and Galloway Community Health NHS Trust	1	1
Shetland HB Headquarters	1	—
Scotland	192	101

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown, by specialist field, of the current vacancies for consultants in the NHS in Scotland. [1375]

Mr. Galbraith: The latest available information is contained in the table:

Hospital medical and dental consultant vacancies by specialty as at 30 September 1996

Specialty	*All vacancies*
Accident and Emergency	10
Anaesthetics	27
Haematology	2
Histopathology	1
Dermatology	2
Cardiology	3
Endocrinology and diabetes	1
Gastroenterology	4
General medicine	2
Nephrology	3
Respiratory medicine	1
Rheumatology	1
Genito-urinary medicine	1
Geriatric medicine	4
Medical paediatrics	7
Neurology	2
Palliative medicine	1
Rehabilitation medicine	5
Obstetrics and Gynaecology	7
Occupation health	2
Child and adolescent psychiatry	8
Forensic psychiatry	1
General psychiatry	32
Mental handicap	5
Old age psychiatry	7
Psychotherapy	1
Diagnostic radiology	12
ENT surgery	5
General surgery	8
Ophthalmology	5
Orthopaedic surgery	10
Plastic surgery	2
Urology	6
Oral surgery	1
Orthodontics	2
Restorative dentistry	1
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New Homes (Energy Rating)

Mr. Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has, and over what time scale, to include in the Building Standards Scotland Regulations a standard assessment procedure for the energy rating of new homes. [2094]

Mr. Chisholm: The Scottish Office Development Department is preparing amendments to the Building Standards Regulations which will include a revision of Part J, Conservation of Fuel and Power. The revision will require the Government standard assessment procedure energy rating to be calculated for all new dwellings and for all dwellings created by conversion. The amending Statutory Instrument will be laid in July or August to come into force three months later.

Ivermectin (Salmon Farms)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many salmon farms in Scotland have *(a)* applied and *(b)* been granted licences to treat their fish with ivermectin; and if he will make a statement. [2120]

Mr. Chisholm: I understand from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency that 64 salmon farms have applied for discharge consents in respect of the use of ivermectin. Sixteen consents have been granted, 15 of which are in operation.

A further 19 consents await a decision by my right hon. Friend on whether to call them in for his own determination as provided for under the Control of Pollution Act 1974.

Local Authority Capping

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to cap any Scottish local authorities in 1997. [2524]

Mr. Dewar: No. All Scottish local authorities have set budgets for 1997–98 at or below the expenditure limits implied by the provisional capping principles which the previous government announced in conjunction with the 1997–98 local government finance settlement.

Water Quangos

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has for the future of the water quangos in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [579]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 22 May 1997]:* The Government is committed to returning the Scottish water authorities to local democratic control. A key consideration in taking this forward will be to ensure, in the light of our Manifesto commitment, that we fully observe both the letter and the spirit of the Nolan Committee's recommended procedures for making appointments to public bodies. We shall introduce change at a sensible pace which does not destabilise the recently constituted water authorities.

I have held discussions with the three current water authority chairmen. Each one of them has told me that he is willing to work closely with the new Government to achieve our objectives. I have therefore told them that I am happy for them to continue to serve until the end of 1997, and that I shall then re-examine the position.

The terms of appointment of roughly half of the present members of the water authorities come to an end on 30 June 1997. I intend, as an immediate first step, to advertise in accordance with the Nolan procedures for new members. We shall then consider those democratically elected local representatives who apply, as well as suitable candidates from other fields, including those current members whose appointments are coming to an end. Overall, I envisage a significant shift in the balance of board membership. The advertisement will make clear that applicants may also be considered for positions as chairmen.

To ensure the water authorities are able to operate effectively in the interim period while the Nolan procedures are being carried through, we shall invite members due to leave at the end of 30 June to accept re-appointment for a further six months to the end of the calendar year. The new appointments will then run from 1 January 1998.

I have asked my officials to conduct a review during this interim six month period of the further steps I might take to strengthen local democratic control. The review will consider a wide range of options for the water authorities. It will also consider any possible implications for the Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council.

I have asked my officials to consult extensively with all interested parties, including COSLA, the water authorities themselves, and the Scottish Water and Sewerage Customers Council. I have asked them to report to me in November.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Competition Law

17. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government policy on reform of the United Kingdom's framework of competition law. [671]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Government's policy is to make competition law more efficient and effective. We intend to introduce a Competition Bill this Autumn which will bring in a tough prohibitive approach to deal with anti-competitive agreements and abuse of market power.

Small Businesses

18. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she plans to take to assist small businesses in the west country. [672]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh).

In addition, small businesses are a very important part of the economy of the west country.

25. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to assist small businesses. [680]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend for Bradford, West (Mr. Singh).

26. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions she proposes to undertake with the Federation of Small Businesses regarding her proposals on statutory interest on late payments. [681]

Mrs. Roche: I intend to have regular contact with all the small firms representative bodies including the Federation of Small Businesses. We will be consulting on the form of legislation for a Statutory Right to Interest in the summer. The Federation of Small Businesses will be invited to submit their views.

32. **Mr. Page:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many organisations representing small firms indicated to her Department whether they are *(a)* for or *(b)* against a statutory right of interest in the recent consultation exercise. [689]

Mrs. Roche: Fifty-four representative organisations, who will have small firms in their membership, responded to the 1996 review. Of these representative organisations 22 were in favour of a Statutory Right to Interest and 32 were against.

It is clear that late payment continues to cause concern to small firms. A number of business surveys consistently show that a majority of small firms support legislation for a Statutory Right to Interest. A recent NOP survey in fact found that 80 per cent. of UK firms supported such legislation. It is in direct response to the committing concerns of small businesses that the Government will introduce the Fair Payment of Commercial Debts Bill.

Airbus Project

19. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions her Department has had with representatives of *(a)* British Aerospace and *(b)* other aircraft manufacturing companies relating to the possibility of financial aid from Her Majesty's Government towards the Airbus 3XX project. [673]

Mr. Battle: The Department is in regular contact with British Aerospace and other UK aerospace companies on a range of issues including new product strategy. We have not, however, received any formal application for finance for the A3XX project.

Minimum Wage

20. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans her Department has to introduce a national minimum wage. [674]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Gracious Speech set out the Government's intention to bring forward legislation for the introduction of a national minimum wage. We are already moving to set up an independent Low Pay Commission to advise the Government on the level at which the minimum wage might be introduced.

33. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what recent representations she has received on the likely effects of the minimum wage and social chapter on Britain's trading prospects. [690]

Mr. McCartney: I have received a number of representations on the minimum wage and social chapter. Employers in every industrial sector support the principle of a national minimum wage. By rejecting an "empty chair" policy on the social chapter, we will enable the UK to use its influence to ensure that European measures promote labour market flexibility and maximise employability.

Industrial Investment (Yorkshire)

21. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to promote industrial investment in Yorkshire. [676]

Mrs. Beckett: My Department has a range of initiatives designed to encourage industrial investment in Yorkshire. These include Regional Selective Assistance, Regional Enterprise Grants and European Structural Funds.

Trading Agreements (Social Clause)

22. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what progress has been made with regard to the possible incorporation of a social clause within future trading agreements; and if she will make a statement. [677]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government is firmly committed to using its best endeavours to eliminate abusive labour practices around the world. We will use every opportunity in the ILO and elsewhere to promote this objective, and we will also explore how the processes of the WTO can reinforce this objective.

European Union

23. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what measures the Government intend taking to improve the competitive position of British companies within the European Union. [678]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Government will work in partnership with business to improve the country's competitiveness. We intend to drive forward progress on the Single Market during our Presidency of the European Union next year to give British Companies better opportunities to sell their products and services throughout Europe.

Regional Aid

24. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to review regional aid policies. [679]

Mrs. Roche: The Government is currently considering a range of measures to improve regional aid policies. These include: legislation on Regional Development Agencies; the introduction of Regional Chambers and a review of the incentives and support the Government provides to smaller firms.

34. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to review the system of regional development assistance. [691]

Mrs. Roche: The Government is currently considering a number of proposals to improve regional development assistance including requests for a review of Assisted Areas Map. We will announce the extent and nature of any review when we have looked at this issue more closely.

30. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has for further review of the Assisted Areas Map. [687]

Mrs. Roche: The Government is considering whether the 1993 Assisted Areas Map needs to be changed and will carry out a review as needed. We will announce the extend and nature of any review when we have looked at this issue more closely.

Export Controls

27. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade when her Department proposes to publish the results of the consultation on strategic export controls of October 1996; and if she will make a statement. [682]

Mrs. Beckett: Copies of the responses to the consultation (with the exception of two for which confidentiality was requested) were placed in the libraries of both Houses in February of this year. Copies of these

responses were also placed at that time in the library of my Department where members of the public could arrange to see them. In addition, I have now arranged for copies to be made available on request from my Department's Export Control Organisation.

We are considering all the responses carefully in formulating our proposals which will be announced in due course.

Inward Investment

28. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the advantages of membership of the European Union for the attraction of inward investment. [683]

Mrs. Beckett: The UK's place in the European Single Market of 370 million consumers is central to our success in attracting inward investment.

Aerospace Industry

29. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what steps she is taking to *(a)* support and *(b)* encourage the development of the aerospace industry in the north-west. [684]

Mr. Battle: The department supports and encourages the development of the aerospace industry through its wide-ranging sponsorship activity. In the north west we work closely with the Consortium of Lancashire Aerospace (CLA), which has secured funding under the Konver scheme. Funds have also been made available to the aerospace sector in the region through the Single Regeneration Budget scheme, Managing in the 90s and through the work of the local TECs.

36. **Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her policy on launch aid for companies engaged in the aerospace industry. [694]

Mr. Battle: The launch aid scheme has demonstrated its value, and the Government will consider fully any applications for launch aid on their merits.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

31. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the progress of the liquidation of BCCI. [688]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I am due to meet my hon. Friend shortly to discuss the progress of the liquidation of BCCI. I note that a first dividend of 24.5 pence in the pound was paid to creditors in December 1996 and I understand that the delay in paying that dividend was caused by the need to settle a number of legal actions in the UK and in foreign jurisdictions. I hope that the liquidators will be able to complete their work with as much speed as possible so that creditors may receive a further, substantial dividend at an early date.

Public Utilities (Regulation)

35. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to strengthen the role of consumers in the regulation of public utilities. [693]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: In the Government's view utility regulation must be open and predictable, and fair to consumers.

Offshore Oil Technology and Supply Office

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) if she will make a statement on the promotions budget for the offshore oil technology and supply office; [1011]

(2) how her Department's oil and gas technology and promotion budget is to be allocated. [1007]

Mr. Battle: The oil and gas technology and promotion budget is handled by the Oil, gas and petrochemicals Supplies Office (OSO). For 1997–98 OSO has a gross programme budget of £3.7 million, as set out in the Supply Estimates. The precise allocation of funds is subject to advice from the OSO Board, but is expected to be £1.5 million for export promotion—including trade fairs, missions and seminars; and £2.2 million to aid competitiveness—including assistance for the Centre for Marine and Petroleum Technology (CMPT), the CRINE Network competitiveness initiative and some technology projects.

Export Companies

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the impact on exporting companies of an interest rate rise. [686]

Mrs. Roche: I do not think it appropriate for me to speculate on the future course of interest rates. Interest rates are to be set by the Bank of England to meet the Government's inflation target.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proportion of lottery proceeds has been distributed to each region to date. [801]

Mr. Chris Smith: The distribution of Lottery funds by region to date is set out in the following table:

Region/country	*Total percentage*[1]
London: National bodies[2]	14
London: Regional bodies	10
North-west	9
North-east	4
Yorkshire and Humberside	6
Eastern	7
East Midlands	4
West Midlands	8
South-west	8
South-east	8
Merseyside	2
Scotland	11
Wales	6
Northern Ireland	2
UK wide	1

[1] Rounded to the nearest percentage.

[2] Awards to bodies based in London include many to institutions that are of national importance and are of benefit to the country as a whole. These are therefore identified separately.

Churchill Papers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what steps he is taking to ensure that access to the papers in the Churchill archive is not restricted. [2080]

Mr. Fisher: Access to the Churchill papers purchased in 1995 by the National Heritage Memorial Fund, and now at the Churchill Archive Centre in Cambridge, is not restricted. There are other sets of papers stored in the Centre, but these are not part of the papers purchased in 1995 and are therefore there on different terms.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will establish a review of the adequacy of the current levels of incapacity benefit. [859]

Mr. Denham: As part of the Government's aim of creating a modern welfare system we will seek to ensure that people who are too sick to work are provided with appropriate support. We also wish to do more to enable those who are able and wish to get back into work to do so.

Income Support (Pensioners)

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the proportion of pensioners who do not claim the income support to which they are entitled. [966]

Mr. Denham: The latest available figures show that in 1994–95 between 34 per cent. and 41 per cent. of pensioners entitled to income support were not taking up their benefit. We want to get help to Britain's poorest pensioners and are commissioning research to establish why they do not claim the income support which is their due.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people were in receipt of income support in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale, in each year since 1992. [266]

Mr. Bradley: The administration of Income Support is a matter for Peter Mathison, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Gordon Prentice, dated 4 June 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many people were in receipt of Income Support (IS) in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale in each year since 1992.

The number of people in receipt of IS for the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale District since 1992 are:

February 1992: 22,002

February 1993: 25,162

February 1994: 24,744

February 1995: 25,153

February 1996: 24,944

February 1997: 20,692

Figures are provisional and subject to amendment.

The data provided is the latest available and relates to the actual number of people in receipt of IS on the last working day of February each year since 1992. The data for February 1997 does not include unemployed customers who now receive Jobseeker's Allowance.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Pension Sharing

Ms Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to introduce pension sharing for divorcing couples. [2523]

Ms Harman: We will introduce pension sharing for divorcing couples. This is an important step towards meeting the Government's objectives of improving the income of women in retirement.

It is the combination of the Basic State Pension and a decent second pension which prevents people from retiring into poverty. But women are less likely than men to have a good second pension.

Women are less likely than men to belong to an occupational pension scheme—in 1991 only 3.9 million women belonged to an occupational pension scheme, compared with 6.8 million men.

Women's occupational pensions are worth less on average than men's: women aged 65–69 have an average income from occupational pensions of just £22 a week, compared with £67 a week for men.

Women are less likely to have a personal pension: only 22 per cent. of women who work full-time have a personal pension, compared with 28 per cent. of men.

As a result, women are more likely than men to be poor in retirement:

Seventy per cent. of the 2 million people over the age of 60 who depend on Income Support are women.

Around three-quarters of the 1 million pensioners who do not claim the Income Support to which they are entitled—and who lose on average £14 a week—are women.

Women are less likely to have a good second pension because they are more likely to be in part-time or low-paid work, and they are more likely to interrupt their working lives to care for their families.

Women make a vital contribution to the family income by bringing up children or caring for an elderly relative. On divorce, this contribution must be recognised, and where appropriate, pension rights shared.

It is not currently possible to share pension rights between men and women. Under the current arrangements, maintenance payments can be made from one spouse to another—we expect usually from husband to wife—once the pension is in payment. But these payments can stop on the death of the pension scheme member, and a former spouse who re-marries could lose their share of the pension. In addition, these arrangements mean that a financial break between the spouses is not achieved; ties between them remain throughout their retirement.

Our proposals will lead to fairer treatment of pensions in financial settlements between divorcing couples and will provide a better and more secure income in retirement for those receiving a share of pension rights.

We will be working in partnership with the pensions industry, family lawyers and others to deliver pension sharing arrangements by April 2000. In order to do this, we will be producing a draft Bill in this session for consultation with interested parties, before we introduce it to Parliament.

This will be the first time that my Department has adopted the approach of consulting on a draft bill, and confirms our commitment to deliver practical, workable and effective measures based on sound legislation.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Stability Pact

Mr. Cash: To ask the President of the Council what plans she has to ensure the parliamentary scrutiny of the stability pact. [1956]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The debate on Europe on Monday 9 June will provide the House with the opportunity to debate and vote on the stability pact proposals.

HEALTH

Dental Services

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many schemes have been selected for grants under the general dental service access fund up to the most recent date available; what has been the total cost of the schemes; to which local health authorities the grants are related; and what amounts are involved. [1889]

Mr. Milburn: Payments from the dental access fund totalling £798,000 were paid to 22 health authorities in the 1996–97 financial year. The table shows the names of the health authorities and the amounts paid to each.

	£
Berkshire	40,000
Buckinghamshire	25,000
Cambridge and Huntingdon	40,000
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	40,000
East Lancashire	40,000
East Surrey	40,000
Gloucestershire	41,000
Herefordshire	20,000
Isle of Wight	40,000
North Cumbria	40,000
North and East Devon	40,000
North and Mid Hampshire	27,000
North Staffordshire	40,000
Oxfordshire	25,000
Portsmouth and SE Hants	40,000
Shropshire	40,000
South Cheshire	40,000
Southern Derbyshire	40,000
Suffolk	40,000
South and West Devon	40,000
Wiltshire	40,000
Wolverhampton	20,000

Blood Processing (Liverpool)

Ms Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the clinical implications of the National Blood Authority's proposal to cease blood processing in Liverpool in relation to hospital and domiciliary services; which hospitals are served by the Liverpool centre; and if he will make a statement. [1571]

Ms Jowell: The transfer of bulk testing and processing work from the Liverpool to the Manchester Blood Centre is part of the National Blood Authority's major reorganisation programme designed to improve the safety, efficiency and reliability of the Blood Service. The transfer will be carefully monitored to ensure that clinical services to hospitals will not be adversely affected.

The hospitals served by the Liverpool blood centre are Alder Hey Children's, Arrowe Park, Broadgreen, Countess of Chester, Fazakerly, Glan Clwyd, Gwynedd, Maelor, Nobles, Ormskirk, Royal Liverpool, St. Helens, Southport, Walton, Warrington and Whiston. The Liverpool centre will continue to supply those hospitals with blood and to provide them with specialist services.

The plans to reorganise the service were announced in November 1995 after a wide-ranging lengthy and in parts contentious consultation exercise. Implementation of the reorganisation programme, which is being phased to tie in with the introduction of a new national computer system was already well advanced under the previous administration. However, in the light of recent representations on this matter, I have agreed to meet hon. Members from the Liverpool area to discuss, and hopefully resolve, their concerns about the change.

Radiography

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to investigate the totals and percentages of the instances of harmful effects from radiography treatment. [1958]

Mr. Boateng: We have no plans currently to collect centrally, information on those who have suffered adverse effects following radiotherapy treatment, although we are keeping these issues under review. It is more appropriate for monitoring to be undertaken at a local level where local problems can be identified. Cancer centres are expected to audit their results, including adverse effects.

The following action has been taken to help women with damage as a result of radiotherapy for breast cancer.

In May 1994 the Department issued guidance entitled "Quality Assurance in Radiotherapy—A Quality Management System for Radiotherapy".

The Royal College of Radiologists at the Department's request, convened a small group of professionals and lay people in Autumn 1994 to consider guidelines for care of women who have suffered tissue damage following radiotherapy for breast cancer. This report was issued to the NHS by the Department in October 1995.

The Royal College of Radiologists carried out a confidential clinical review of 126 women who had suffered injury following radiotherapy treatment for breast cancer at 15 centres in the period 1980–1993. The report makes recommendations on the management of breast cancer, particularly on radiotherapy, and for further research.

With regard to those suffering adverse effects following pelvic radiotherapy for gynaecological cancers, in 1996, a Working Group, which includes representatives from a number of Royal Colleges, voluntary organisations and the Department, was set up to consider the preparation of patient information leaflets concerning possible adverse effects following pelvic radiotherapy and to raise awareness generally. A sub-group is also considering issuing guidelines for health professionals on the care of women suffering adverse effects as a result of pelvic radiotherapy.

Dementia

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that the needs of people with dementia and their carers are reflected in the membership and terms of reference of the Royal Commission on long-term care; and if he will make a statement. [2093]

Mr. Boateng: The Government intend to examine in detail, as heralded in our manifesto, provisions for long-term care of the elderly. We will make a further statement on this once the form of that examination and its content have been settled.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide additional resources to fund combination therapies for prisoners with HIV/AIDS. [1156]

Ms Jowell: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

English and French Children

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment his Department has made of reports of the disparity between English and French children in their understanding of ethical concepts and of the forces underlying social coherence; and if he will make a statement about the contribution of the study of philosophy in this respect. [1887]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department is aware of the Quest Project investigating the attitudes of primary age pupils in England and France. As part of its ongoing responsibility to keep the school curriculum under review, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) is involved in a project investigating the relationship between the school curriculum and pupils' national identity in a small group of European countries.

Primary Class Sizes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what range of estimates his Department has made for *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–00 and *(c)* 2000-01 of the costs of ensuring that no five to seven-year-old in England and Wales is educated in a class of more than 30 children; and if he will make available the relevant background papers. [2213]

Mr. Byers: We will be discussing with LEAs and others the implementation of our policy on class sizes following publication of a White Paper this summer.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to review the methods of calculating *(a)* class sizes and *(b)* pupil-teacher ratios in primary schools. [1924]

Mr. Byers: None.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of extra primary teachers which would be necessary to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds to below 30 without increasing class sizes for older children. [1938]

Mr. Byers: We shall be discussing with local authorities the detailed implementation of our policy to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven year olds.

Head Teachers (Primary Schools)

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to increase the proportion of class contact time by primary school head-teachers. [1952]

Mr. Byers: It is already a professional duty of head teachers to participate, to such extent as may be appropriate having regard to their other duties, in the teaching of pupils, including the provision of cover for absent teachers. The Government has no plans to ask the School Teachers' Review Body to recommend any amendment to that professional duty.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many applications to the Funding Agency for Schools for capital allocations for nursery provision in grant-maintained schools *(a)* have been made, *(b)* have been approved, *(c)* have been rejected and *(d)* are still under consideration; and if he will list the applications in each category. [2149]

Mr. Byers: These matters are the responsibility of the Funding Agency for Schools. I have asked the Chairman of the Funding Agency to write to the hon. Member with this information.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the change to the pupil:teacher ratio in secondary schools resulting from the abolition of the assisted places scheme. [1946]

Mr. Byers: The Education (Schools) Bill allows for the phasing out of the assisted places scheme. There will be little if any change in the pupil:teacher ratio in secondary schools as a result of the phasing out of the scheme.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of extra primary teachers to be provided from the abolition of the assisted places scheme in each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [1947]

Mr. Byers: We intend to use the savings from the Assisted Places Scheme to fund the reduction in infant class sizes. It will be for individual LEAs to judge what adjustments will be needed to primary teacher numbers to ensure smaller classes.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the amount of money available for education from the abolition of the assisted places scheme in each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02, net of the costs of educating within the state sector those pupils who would otherwise have been within the assisted places scheme. [1948]

Mr. Byers: The previous Government's published expenditure plans for the assisted places scheme in England for the years 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are £140 million, £160 million and £180 million respectively. The Education (Schools) Bill currently before Parliament provides for no new assisted places to be awarded after the start of academic year 1997–98 and savings will therefore begin to accrue in financial year 1998–99. The Government's spending plans for 1998–99 onwards will be announced in due course and will take account of the savings progressively released from phasing out the scheme. Those savings will amount to about £100 million in total by the year 2000. There will be no significant additional burden on Local Education Authorities from educating children who would otherwise have entered the assisted places scheme search year.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children will leave an assisted place at the end of each academic year up to 2001. [1949]

Mr. Byers: We estimate that nearly 5,000 assisted place holders will leave their schools at the end of the current academic year 1996–97 and a similar number will leave in 1997–98. The numbers leaving in future years will depend on the number of entry places taken up, for the last time, in September 1997 and are likely to increase as previous years' entry cohorts move up through the school and then leave. It is our intention that the scheme will be phased out over the seven years to 2004.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children will continue to hold an assisted place after the scheme has been ended in each year up to 2004; and at what cost to the public purse. [1950]

Mr. Byers: There are some 33,140 assisted pupils in England in the current academic year 1996–97 and we expect that around 38,000 children will hold assisted places in academic year 1997–98. The number of assisted place holders from 1998–99 onwards will depend on the number of entry places taken up, for the last time, this coming September and will reduce year on year until the last pupil leaves in academic year 2003–04.

Current plans, already announced, for expenditure on the assisted places scheme in financial year 1997–98 amount to £140 million. Provision for 1998–99 will be reviewed in the light of our commitment to phase out the scheme while allowing existing assisted place holders to continue their education a participating schools.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the numbers of independent schools whose viability depends upon the assisted places scheme. [1953]

Mr. Byers: Less than one in seven pupils, on average, at schools participating in the scheme currently hold assisted places. The phasing out of the scheme will have no significant effect on schools' viability overall. Participating schools themselves have made alternative arrangements for supporting some pupils and many will have no difficulty in filling other places with full fee-payers.

Music and Ballet Scheme

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average cost of a place under the music and ballet scheme; how many children currently hold places; and what was the total cost of the scheme in the last year for which figures are available. [1951]

Mr. Byers: In the current academic year 1996–97 there are 644 children aided under the music and ballet scheme at an average cost of £13,858 per pupil. The cost includes boarding provision and intensive specialist tuition and training. The total cost of the scheme in financial year 1996–97 was £7.9 million.

Teaching Staff

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* qualified teachers and *(b)* classroom assistants in (i) state primary and (ii) state secondary schools there were in each year since 1987. [2024]

Ms Estelle Morris: The available information is shown in the following table.

Full-time equivalent numbers of qualified teachers and education support staff in maintained primary and secondary schools in England: 1987 to 1996

Position as at January

Thousands

	Primary schools[1]		*Secondary schools*[2]	
	Qualified teachers	*Education support staff*[3]	*Qualified teachers*	*Education support staff*[3]
1997[4]	182.4	[5]—	181.7	[5]—
1996	182.6	50.6	180.9	23.1
1995	181.9	46.3	181.4	21.5
1994	180.6	41.1	178.8	19.5
1993	179.4	36.4	177.1	17.8
1992	177.9	32.5	176.9	17.0
1991	176.3	n/a	177.0	n/a
1990	175.6	n/a	181.1	n/a
1989	172.4	n/a	186.5	n/a
1988	169.7	n/a	193.9	n/a
1987	168.4	n/a	201.4	n/a

[1] Figures excludes nursery schools but include nursery classes within primary schools.
[2] Excluding sixth form colleges.
[3] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff and other support staff i.e. librarians, technicians, medical staff and child care assistants. Voluntary or unpaid staff are excluded.
[4] Figures are provisional.
[5] Information is not yet available.
n/a = not available.

Disability

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will establish a statutory commission for disabled people. [2171]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Our manifesto commits us to establishing "comprehensive, enforceable civil rights" for disabled people. We are consulting interested parties on the best way to achieve this and we shall develop proposals in the light of our discussions. The creation of a commission with enforcement powers will be central to those considerations.

WALES

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the assisted places scheme. [634]

Mr. Hain: The Education (Schools) Bill provides for the abolition of the Assisted Places Scheme after the September 1997 intake of pupils. Children in the scheme, or joining in September 1997, will be allowed to complete their primary or secondary education.

Wrexham to Bidston Line

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with Regional Railways North West concerning enhanced services for the Wrexham to Bidston railway line. [1262]

Mr. Hain: None. The franchise operator for the Regional Railways North West franchise is contractually required to provide a minimum level of service as specified by the Franchising Director in the Passenger Service Requirement for the franchise. Subject to Railtrack's agreement, the franchise operator may operate services other than those specified, if he desires to do so.

Repair and Improvement Grants

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the number of repair and improvement grants outstanding for more than *(a)* one year and *(b)* two years in each (i) county and (ii) county borough in Wales. [1229]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Information in the form requested is not held centrally but the following table shows the numbers of renovation grant applications (under the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act) awaiting determination at the end of December 1996. From 17 December 1996, grants for home renovation are available under the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996.

Number of renovation grant approvals and applications outstanding by unitary authority

	Grants approved April–December 1996	*Applications outstanding at 31 December 1996*
Blaenau Gwent	230	506
Bridgend	297	140
Caephilly	258	1,143
Cardiff	701	32
Carmarthenshire	377	295
Ceredigion	208	205
Conwy	179	151
Denbighshire	208	500
Flintshire	213	222
Gwynedd	367	297
Isle of Anglesey	166	19
Merthyr Tydfil	112	24
Monmouthshire	56	16
Neath Port Talbot	486	104
Newport	185	202
Pembrokeshire	154	591
Powys	229	487
Rhondda Cynon Taff	606	130
Swansea	417	143
Torfaen	121	101
Vale of Glamorgan	245	106
Wrexham	200	21
Wales	6,015	5,435

Unemployment

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the number of people who are unemployed but not claiming benefit in Wales. [1236]

Mr. Hain: According to the autumn 1996 Labour Force Survey, an estimated 50,000 people in Wales were unemployed on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition (that is they were without a paid job and were available to start work within the next two weeks and had either looked for work in the past four weeks or were waiting to start a job already obtained) but not reporting receipt of unemployment-related benefit.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the latest number of people on Government employment and training schemes who are not registered as unemployed. [1237]

Mr. Hain: People on government training schemes are not registered as unemployed. The information contained in the following table shows the total number of trainees in Wales in training and those who have employed status (i.e. have a contract of employment). The figures quoted are provisional.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has responsibility for employment schemes in Wales.

Employed status trainees in Wales as at 30 March 1997

	Total number of trainees in training	*Employed status trainees in training*
Youth credits	14,815	7,957
Modern apprenticeships	5,107	4,867
Accelerated modern apprenticeships	963	727
Training for work	3,826	359
Total trainees	24,711	13,910

Source:
TEC Management information.
Note:
Figures do not include trainees whose training is supported under local initiatives by Training and Enterprise Councils since this information is not collected centrally.

Class Sizes

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to provide additional funding to *(a)* retain teachers and *(b)* reduce class sizes; and if he will make a statement. [1256]

Mr. Hain: Local authorities have the discretion to decide how much of their available resources to allocate to individual services, such as education. Staffing levels in individual schools are then a matter for the governing body. The Education (Schools) Bill which had its second reading on 2 June phases out the Assisted Places Scheme leaving the way open to use resources to cut class sizes for 5, 6 and 7 year olds to 30 or under. We will be consulting shortly on proposals.

Derelict Land

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will institute a central register of derelict land. [1260]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Welsh Development Agency already maintains, in conjunction with local authorities, comprehensive information on derelict sites throughout Wales. This information is available from the Agency or the relevant local authority on request.

Holyhead to Crewe Line

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has to assist the electrification of the Holyhead to Crewe railway line. [1261]

Mr. Hain: The Government has no plans for the electrification of the Crewe to Holyhead railway line, but Railtrack are taking forward a strategy for improvements on the Crewe to Bangor section of the route which will increase line speeds to 161 kph.

Industry

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement concerning his policy for encouraging industry in Wales. [1298]

Mr. Hain: Nationally, we aim to create a stable macro-economic environment with low and stable inflation, and a flexible and better-trained workforce. Together with our plans to co-ordinate the economic development agencies into an Economic Powerhouse for Wales, this will improve the productivity and investment performance of industry throughout Wales.

Buses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the level of service provided by buses in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [1302]

Mr. Hain: In the past ten years or so, there has been a marked increase in the number of vehicle kilometres operated by local bus services in Wales, although during the same period the number of local passenger journeys has declined in Wales as throughout Britain.

The Government is keen to reverse the decline in passenger journeys and will be pursuing a range of policies to encourage the greater use of public transport, including local bus services.

Incapacity

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate his Department has made of the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women of working age who are incapacitated by long-term sickness or invalidity. [1230]

Mr. Win Griffiths: In the 1995 Welsh Health Survey 26 per cent. of men and 20 per cent. of women of working age who replied considered that they had a long-term illness, health problem, or handicap which limited their daily activities for the work they could do.

Disused Railway Lines

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to encourage dedicated bus routes on disused railway lines with particular reference to the Shotton Steelworks to Mickle Trafford Railtrack. [1300]

Mr. Hain: Planning Policy Guidance encourages local authorities in Wales to promote public transport, including improved facilities to make bus services more attractive. It also encourages them to ensure that disused railway lines are not severed by piecemeal development if there is a realistic prospect of their use for transport purposes in the future.

I understand that Flintshire County Council are developing proposals to convert into a guided busway the disused railway line which runs from Mickle Trafford into Deeside, and I stand ready to consider any substantive proposals for support which the County Council may bring forward.

Beef Farms

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farmers he estimates are engaged in beef production in Wales. [1304]

Mr. Win Griffiths: There were 13,600 whole-time and part-time farmers, partners and directors working on farms which had cattle in the beef breeding herd at 3 June 1996.

Source: June 1996 Agricultural and Horticultural Census.

Right to Roam

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning the right to roam in Wales. [1308]

Mr. Win Griffiths: In our election manifesto we made it clear that our policies for the countryside include greater freedom for people to explore our open countryside. The Government is presently considering options for giving effect to this.

Index of Socio-economic Conditions

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of poverty and deprivation levels in Wales; which indicators were used in making the assessment; and if he will publish the data and his assessment of it; [1545]

(2) if he will make it his policy to compile and publish an equivalent for Wales of the Department of the Environment Index of Local Conditions. [1544]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Department publishes an Index of Socio-economic Conditions for each Unitary Authority in Wales, based mainly on 1991 Census data, which is similar to the Department of the Environment's Index of Local Conditions. Officials are currently discussing possible improvements to the Welsh Office Index, including ways of updating it, with officers from Welsh local authorities. A copy of the Welsh Office Index, including an explanatory note listing the factors used, has been placed in the Library.

GP Fundholders

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what studies he has undertaken of the allocation levels to first wave general practitioner fundholders relative to those in subsequent waves and its impact on the practices over the whole period 1991 to 1997; and if he will make a statement. [2223]

Mr. Ron Davies: I have not commissioned any such studies. The allocation process is a matter of local determination between a health authority and the fundholders in its area. My responsibilities are to establish the policy framework and should local agreement not be achieved to arbitrate at the request of the parties. As no formal requests have been made there is no need to commission a study at this time.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Bro Taf health authority regarding *(a)* the allocation of funds to general practitioner fundholders, *(b)* monitoring of expenditure relative to the allocation and *(c)* sanctions in the case of overspending; and if he will make a statement. [2224]

Mr. Davies: I have not met the Chairman of Bro Taf health authority to discuss GP Fundholding. However, my officials have regular meetings with their Health authority counterparts about fundholding matters including the allocation process and risk management.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Bro Taf health authority concerning the impact of disputes between GP fundholders and health authorities over funding levels on patient waiting lists relative to patients charter targets for elective surgery. [2222]

Mr. Davies: The Chairman of Bro Taf health authority has not drawn any such disputes to my attention. Therefore neither I nor my officials have had any consultations with the authority on this subject. GP fundholders are subject to the same Patient's Charter constraints as health authorities and I expect health authorities to monitor their performance in this area.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Overseas Aid

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the amounts of money Britain has given in overseas aid *(a)* in real terms and *(b)* as a percentage of gross domestic product in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [1882]

Clare Short: International comparisons of figures for official development assistance (Oda) are normally presented in relation to gross national product on a calendar year basis. UK assistance between 1991 and 1995 (the latest year for which figures are available) was as follows:

	Real terms (million at 1995 prices)	*Oda/GNP (percentage)*
1991	2,044	0.32
1992	1,988	0.31
1993	2,029	0.31
1994	2,138	0.31
1995	2,000	0.28

The Government are firmly committed to working for a safer, more decent and environmentally stable world, and the eradication of poverty. As announced in the Queen's Speech, our development strategy will be set out in a White Paper to be published in the Autumn.

Indian Subcontinent

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about current aid support to the Indian sub-continent. [327]

Clare Short *[pursuant to her reply, 21 May 1997, c. 91]:* The reply should have read Britain spent £298 million on bilateral aid to India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka in 1995–96. South Asia receives the second largest allocation of British bilateral aid of any region in the world, after sub-Saharan Africa. The overall objective of our assistance programme is to help reduce poverty and promote sustainable development.

Montserrat

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid the Government are

providing to the people of Montserrat in respect of damage caused by the recent volcano; and if she will make a statement. [1746]

Clare Short: Since July 1995, when volcanic activity in Montserrat began, we have committed £10.5 million of Emergency Aid to address the island's immediate needs, and over £12 million of Budgetary Aid to maintain essential government services. We have also spent £12.5 million in Development Aid.

In August 1996, a £25 million aid package was announced for the continued provision of public services and for infrastructural development of the north of the island where most of the population has had to relocate.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 6 June 1997

DEFENCE

Political and Special Advisers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2424]

Mr. George Robertson: I have appointed Mr. Alasdair McGowan, who was my research assistant, as a Special Adviser.

The terms and conditions of each appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special Advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary are not provided to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

This is a personal appointment which I made following consultation with the Permanent Head of the Department and the Prime Minister.

Harrier Carrier Purchase (India)

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what negotiations *(a)* have been held and *(b)* are proposed with the Indian Government about the purchase of a Harrier carrier; and what related sales would ensue from such a sale. [1886]

Mr. Spellar: No negotiations have taken place between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of India about the purchase of a Harrier carrier, and none is planned. Currently, no Royal Navy ships of this type are available for disposal, nor will any be in the foreseeable future.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Orders in Council

Mr. Fallon: To ask the President of the Council if she will ensure that the Library receives a copy of each Order in Council. [1923]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I see no case for additional dissemination of Orders in Council. Over 600 Orders in Council, including those recording the admission of new Privy Counsellors and Ministerial appointments, are made each year. Statutory Instruments are published, in many cases following Parliamentary consideration and are thereafter available in the Library. A number of Orders, which include all those relating to the Civil Service, together with Royal Proclamations, are published in the *London Gazette* of which the Library holds copies. Proposed revisions to the Statutes of the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and their colleges are laid before the House of Commons before approval by Her Majesty. Other categories of Order, including those confirming some 200 Schemes made each year by the Church Commissioners, those approving Channel Islands legislation, those approving the reports of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and those approving the grant of Royal Charters and allowing amendments to the Charters of Chartered bodies, are already in the public domain and copies can always be made available on request.

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Forth: To ask the President of the Council if she will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in her Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2416]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: As indicated in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's Answer of 2 June to the hon. Member for Chichester, three Special Advisers are being appointed in the Privy Council Office, subject to agreement on their salaries. Mr. Ian McKenzie, who was previously my Research Assistant, will act as my Special Adviser. Mr. Damian Welfare, who is currently Head of Government relations and pubic affairs with the Local Government Association and Miss Marianne Morris, who is an administrator in the Labour Party, have been offered appointment as Special Advisers to my Noble Friend, the Lord Privy Seal, in his capacity as Leader of the House of Lords. All are personal appointments by the Minister concerned following consultations with the Permanent Head of the Department and the Prime Minister.

Special Advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 and £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within the range. Details of previous salaries are similarly confidential between departments and the individuals concerned.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Yellow Fever

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to meet WHO representatives to discuss the possible spread of yellow fever to Asia; and if she will make a statement. [2099]

Clare Short: DFID representatives will be meeting with WHO to discuss yellow fever issues in June. We are a significant contributor to the work of WHO to improve disease surveillance and to ensure effective control during outbreaks. Through our support we aim to improve national infrastructures and the capacity for detection. We are also funding the revision of the International Health Regulations, which cover yellow fever.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the risk of yellow fever spreading to Asia; and if she will make a statement. [2098]

Clare Short: Professional advice is that the risk of importation of yellow fever through an infected individual is real and could result in a focused outbreak. However, such an occurrence is unlikely to lead to the disease becoming endemic. The risk is reduced by the application of international travel regulations regarding yellow fever and the increasing use of vaccine in countries where yellow fever is endemic.

Drug Donation Guidelines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to meet WHO representatives to discuss worldwide implementation of the UN Guidelines for Drug Donation; and if she will make a statement. [2100]

Clare Short: We support the implementation of the UN guidelines for drug donations formulated by WHO's Drugs Action Programme (DAP). In addition to financial support, DFID holds the chair of the DAP Management Advisory committee which regularly reviews progress on implementation of the guidelines.

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list *(a)* the names, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in her Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2411]

Clare Short: DFID has two special advisers, Daniel Harris and Jessica Crow. Both DFID special advisers were previously my personal advisers.

The terms and conditions of each appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

These are personal appointments by me following consultation with the Permanent Head of the Department and the Prime Minister.

Myanmar

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) if she will make a statement on the current provision of aid to Myanmar; [2134]

(2) if she will make a statement on her policy in respect of Myanmar. [2133]

Clare Short: In common with its European Partners, Britain suspended non-humanitarian aid to Burma in 1988. There are no present plans to change this position.

In 1995–96 (the latest year for which figures are available), British bilateral aid came to £324,000 of which £294,000 was for the support of refugees on the Thai-Burma border and for disaster relief. The remainder includes colonial pension payments (which are charged to the Aid Programme) and expenditure under Head of Mission discretionary schemes.

Britain's estimated share of net multilateral aid to Burma, all of which was for humanitarian purposes, came to £900,000 in 1995 (the latest available figure).

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Political and Personal Appointments

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many political and personal appointments he has made; and at what cost to public funds. [1582]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 5 June 1997]:* With the Prime Minister's approval I have appointed the following special advisers: Conor Ryan, and Sophie Linden (part-time).

Their salaries will be paid from public funds.

I have also announced the following appointments of recognised experts to advise me and the Department:

STANDARDS AND EFFECTIVENESS UNIT

Michael Barber—(Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, London University)

STANDARDS TASK FORCE

Tim Brighouse—(Director of Education, Birmingham)

Chris Woodhead—(Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools)

NATIONAL ADVISORY GROUP ON ADULT LEARNING

Robert Fryer—(Principal of the Northern College for residential Adult Education, Barnsley)

Alan Tuckett—(Director of NIACE)

NUMERACY TASK FORCE

David Reynolds—(Professor of Education, Newcastle University)

Martin Armstrong—(Deputy Headteacher, Marlwood School, Gloucestershire)

Margaret Brown—(Professor of Mathematics, King's College, London)

David Burghes—(Professor of Education, University of Exeter)

Margaret Dawes—(KPMG)

Patricia Petch—(Chair, National Governors Council)

Carol Robinson—(Headteacher, William Ford Primary School, Barking and Dagenham)

Anita Straker—(Director, National Numeracy Project)

Anne Waterhouse—(Headteacher, Ormskirk Asmall County Primary School, Ormskirk, Lancashire)

The salary of Professor Barber will be reimbursed from public funds. I will provide the information on the total costs to the Department when agreement has been reached with the special advisers on their precise employment terms.

Teachers' Pension Fund

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement about the future management of the Teachers' Pension Fund. [1446]

Mr. Byers: The consultation period on further changes designed to enhance the flexibility of teachers' pension arrangements and on proposals for a longer term review of the scheme ends on 9 June. My right hon. Friend will make an announcement about these matters in due course.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what further proposals he has relating to the transfer of powers from the London Docklands development corporation to the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Southwark and Newham. [2164]

Ms Angela Eagle: The only statutory powers which the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC) have and which it is necessary to return to the local authorities are those concerned with LDDC's responsibilities as planning authority. Local authorities already have a range of powers enabling them to pursue the kind of general regeneration remit which LDDC has undertaken.

Since 1994 the LDDC have been pursuing a phased programme of withdrawal from the Docklands Urban Development Area (UDA) leading to complete withdrawal and dissolution of the organisation in March 1998. Those phases of the withdrawal programme successfully completed to date are:—

Bermondsay Riverside (LB Southwark)—Area removed from the UDA and planning powers returned to Southwark council on 31 October 1994.

Beckton (LB Newham)—Area removed from the UDA and planning powers returned to Newham Council on 31 December 1995

Surrey Docks (LB Southwark)—Area removed from the UDA and planning powers returned to Southwark Council on 20 December 1996.

Wapping and Limehouse (LB Tower Hamlets)—Area removed from the UDA and planning powers returned to Tower Hamlets council on 31 January 1997.

Apart from transitional powers, enabling completion of certain projects and activities underway at the time of the removal of these areas from the UDA, the LDDC ceased to have any powers to operate in the dedesignated areas after the dates set out.

It is intended that the Isle of Dogs, Leamouth and South Poplar (LB Tower Hamlets) will be removed from the UDA and planning powers returned to LB Tower Hamlets byu the end of this year. LDDC's remaining planning powers thereafter (covering only the Royal Docks area) will return to Newham council when LDDC is dissolved in March 1998.

Planning Permission

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce time limits upon the validity of planning permission. [2296]

Mr. Raynsford: Paragraphs 53 to 60 of DoE Circular 11/95 (Welsh Office Circular 35/95) give comprehensive guidance on this issue. I have no plans to change legislation in this area.

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in the Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2426]

Mr. Prescott: Joe Irvin, my Special Adviser, was previously my chief of staff when Deputy Leader of the Labour party; Kate Davies, special adviser to the Minister for Transport, was previously his researcher; and David Taylor, my unpaid special adviser, is on temporary leave of absence from his position as Chief Executive of Lancashire Enterprises plc.

The terms and conditions of each appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special Advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individual concerned.

These are my personal appointments following consultation with the Permanent Secretaries of my Departments, and are approved by the Prime Minister.

Council Tax

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to instigate a comprehensive revaluation of household dwellings for council tax banding purposes; and if he will make a statement. [2403]

Mr. Raynsford: The question of when there should be a revaluation of domestic properties for council tax purposes is one that I shall wish to discuss with the local Government Association and others, before reaching a view.

Drinking Water

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will commission a study on levels of pyrethroids entering drinking water; and if he will make a statement. [2239]

Angela Eagle: Water companies are required to monitor drinking water supplies for those pesticides whose properties and usage make it likely that they will be present. Pyrethroids are unlikely to be present in water supplies. Nevertheless, some water companies have monitored their supplies for key pyrethroids. Since 1991

over 20,000 tests have been carried out for pyrethroids and on no occasion has a pyrethroid been found above the drinking water standard for individual pesticides of 0.1 microgram per litre.

TRANSPORT

Fuel Duty (Buses)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to restore fuel duty rebate to public buses. [2404]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I shall be considering all aspects of support for the bus industry with Treasury colleagues as part of my examination of the best way to introduce an integrated transport policy.

Salisbury Bypass

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what decision he has reached concerning the proposed Salisbury bypass. [2238]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No decision has yet been made on the Salisbury bypass. We are currently taking forward a strategic review of the road programme and an announcement of the terms of that review will be made in due course.

Women Travellers

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is proposing to enhance the personal safety of women travellers on the railways; and if he will make a statement. [2705]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department of Transport is working with train operators to develop good practice on implementing personal security measures both at stations and on-board vehicles. We are currently developing a secure stations scheme which will establish national best practice on security standards and accredit those stations that have implemented a package of security measures. We will also shortly be publishing the results of our research into people's perceptions of their personal security and measures that would make people feel more confident when using public transport.

Motor Vehicle Licences

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations his Department has received on the subject of the issuing of motor vehicles licences; if he will increase the number of post offices able to issue licences; and if he will make a statement. [2280]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Some 521 representations have been made over the past three years. The current network of 4,000 vehicle licence issuing post offices is unlikely to be extended unless it can be shown to be cost effective and does not add to the cost of collecting vehicle excise duty.

Bus Services

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will issue guidelines for the improvement of bus services on Sundays. [2457]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I am examining how buses should play their part in an integrated transport policy. The best way of encouraging an adequate provision of bus services throughout the week will be part of this work.

Sustainable Transport Packages

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to give local authorities further powers and funding to develop sustainable transport packages. [2179]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have no evidence that local authorities need additional powers to implement transport packages. The Government will continue to fund viable transport packages as far as resources permit.

Sound-reducing Barriers (A20)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what were the criteria used to determine that sound-reducing barriers should be erected alongside the A20, Swanley bypass in Kent. [1655]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 6 June 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your recent question about the criteria used to determine that sound-reducing barriers should be erected alongside the A20 Swanley Bypass.

Those barriers were erected under discretionary powers in the Highways Act, in accordance with a policy announced in March 1979 to provide noise barriers alongside trunk roads, subject to the availability of funds and if appropriate, where properties exposed to high noise levels had not benefited from the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975. The barriers at Swanley were provided because they offered an effective shield to a sufficient number of properties exposed to traffic noise at or above the level at which they would have qualified for insulation under the Noise Insulation Regulations and the cost did not exceed the notional cost of providing insulation.

I hope this is helpful.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Forth: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2410]

Dr. David Clark: There is only one special adviser in my office, Andrew Lappin, his previous occupation was parliamentary researcher.

The terms and conditions of his appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and previous salaries are not provided in order to protect the privacy of individuals concerned.

This was a personal appointment by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster following consultation with the Permanent Head of the Department and the Prime Minister.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Political and Special Advisers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2418]

Mr. Hoon: There are currently no political or special advisers in this Department.

WALES

Mixed Sex Wards

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library the statistics held by his Department on the extent of *(a)* mixed sex wards, *(b)* mixed sex bays and *(c)* mixed sex bathing and toilet facilities in hospitals. [781]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information requested is not held centrally.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if he will make a statement. [1662]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 4 June by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, *Official Report*, column *190*.

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2412]

Mr. Ron Davies: My special advisers are John Adams and Huw Roberts. Their previous occupations were policy adviser and political consultant respectively.

The terms and conditions of each appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

These are personal appointments by the Secretary of State following consultation with the Permanent Head of the Department and the Prime Minister.

Cardiff Royal Infirmary

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Llandough NHS Trust, the UHW NHS Trust and the Bro Taf health authority concerning the implementation of the conditions imposed by his predecessor concerning the closure of the Cardiff Royal Infirmary *(a)* generally and *(b)* specifically in relation to elective orthopaedic surgery. [2406]

Mr. Ron Davies: None, though my officials keep in close touch with the health authority and local trusts, who are actively working together on the action plan for the transfer of services from CRI to UHW. The business case for the transfer of services from CRI to UHW has been approved and Llandough NHS Trust is preparing a business case for the transfer of elective orthopaedics.

St. David's Hospital Site

Mr. Rhodri Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Bro Taf health authority and the Cardiff Community Healthcare Trust concerning a start date for the replacement neighbourhood hospital on the St. David's Hospital site. [2409]

Mr. Ron Davies: None, but my officials have been in contact with the trust, who will be submitting an outline business case to the Welsh Office in the near future.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Mr. Asil Nadir

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Attorney-General what representations his Department is making to the Turkish authorities over the case of Mr. Nadir. [2210]

The Attorney-General: The Turkish authorities were notified, through Interpol, of the existence of a warrant for the arrest of Asil Nadir. They were asked to arrest him on his arrival in Turkey with a view to extradition. They have declined to do this because the Turkish constitution forbids extradition of Turkish citizens to other countries.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants have applied for an award for vibration white finger in each coalfield area; and how many awards have been made since 1992. [1703]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

New claims to industrial injuries disablement benefit for vibration white finger in the years ending March 1996 and 1997 by standard statistical region

Region	April to March 1995–96	April to March 1996–97
Northern	6,440	3,950
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,040	1,640
East Midlands	250	600
East Anglia	10	30
South East	50	120
South West	20	60
West Midlands	370	470
North West	660	800
Scotland	1,880	2,730
Wales	1,240	1,970
Total Great Britain	12,960	12,370

Initial awards of industrial injuries disablement benefit for vibration white finger since April 1992

Region	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96
Northern	6	11	6	13
Yorkshire and Humber	3	2	8	5
East Midlands	3	6	3	3
East Anglia	1	2	—	1
South East	4	5	15	5
South West	2	3	5	3
West Midlands	3	5	5	11
North West	6	7	23	8
Scotland	12	23	74	200
Wales	—	1	7	1
Total Great Britain	40	65	146	250

Note:
Figures are based on a 10 per cent. sample of claims and a 100 per cent. count of assessments.
Source:
Analytical Services Division data.

Hearing Loss (War Pensioners)

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for a full medical and scientific review of the qualification for war pensions in respect of noise-induced hearing loss; when the review will begin; and how long the review is expected to take. [1632]

Mr. Denham: On 23 May the Minister with special responsibility for war pensions, my noble Friend the Baroness Hollis of Heigham, wrote to Mr. Graham Downing, national president of the Royal British Legion. She informed him that she would be arranging a meeting of experts in the field of hearing loss to review the scientific basis of the approach to the assessment of noise induced sensorineural hearing loss in war pensions. My noble friend will invite Professors Lutman and Davis to take part along with other independent experts who have not been involved in the matter so far.

The timing of the meeting will depend on the availability of the participants. My noble Friend will shortly be writing to the experts to invite their participation and to establish when they are free to meet.

We are aware of the controversy surrounding this issue and are determined to be satisfied that the medical evidence is clear and unambiguous and that decisions are made in accordance with war pensions legislation. I would hope that the review will be able to come to a speedy conclusion.

Bronchitis and Emphysema

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants in each coalfield area had made an application for chronic bronchitis and emphysema awards; and how many awards were made between 13 September 1993 and 9 April 1997. [1701]

Mr. Denham: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

New claims to, and awards for industrial injuries disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema between 13 September 1993 and 31 March by BA area directorates

Benefits agency area directorate	Claims received	Awards made
Anglia	27	3
Chilterns	24	4
South London and West Sussex	—	—
West Country	163	6
East London and Essex	43	—
South East	507	34
Wessex	1	—
East Midlands	6,266	736
Midlands and South West	680	56
West Mercia	3,870	409
Wales	10,354	1,530
Merseyside	539	50
Greater Manchester	355	32
Lancashire and Cumbria	2,377	157
Tyne Tees	7,540	640
South Yorkshire and Humberside	7,202	878
North and West Yorkshire	3,103	447
Glasgow and Paisley	252	8
North, Central and West Scotland	1,954	64
East Scotland	2,484	103
Total Great Britain	47,741	5,157

New claims to, and awards for industrial injuries disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema between 1 April 1996 and 8 April 1997 by BA area directorates

Benefits agency area directorate	Claims received	Awards made
East of Scotland	140	6
West of Scotland	41	—
Tyne Tees	442	15
Yorkshire	720	81
Greater Manchester	102	17
North West Coast	74	5

New claims to, and awards for industrial injuries disablement benefit for chronic bronchitis and emphysema between 1 April 1996 and 8 April 1997 by BA area directorates

Benefits agency area directorate	*Claims received*	*Awards made*
Wales	863	55
West Midlands	87	2
Mercia	546	82
West Country	14	2
London South	42	—
Chilterns	3	—
East London and Anglia	7	—
Total Great Britain	3,081	265

Notes:

1. All figures taken from a 100 per cent. count of claims received and awards made. Figures for awards do not include assessments of less than 14 per cent. disablement, which may have resulted in an aggregated pension.
2. Benefits Agency Area Directorates were changed from 1 April 1996.

Source:

Benefits Agency BREM system data and Central Data Unit.

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list *(a)* the names, *(b)* the salary *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in her Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2414]

Ms Harman: I have appointed John McTernan and Liz Kendall as special advisers. Both were formerly employed as advisers to me in opposition. The terms and conditions of their appointments are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. Special advisers are paid within a range of £23,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually within this range. Details of present and previous salaries are not provided, in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

These are personal appointments made by me following consultation with the permanent secretary and the Prime Minister.

Wages (Vouchers)

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action she intends to take to stop the practice of employers paying part of employees' wages in vouchers. [2260]

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment she has made of the economic impact on households of employers issuing shopping vouchers in lieu of wages. [2297]

Mr. Denham: The Government are aware of employers' use of vouchers as (part) payment of wages. In 1994–95, about £40 million was paid through such practices to approximately 160,000 employees whose earnings, including benefits in kind, were £8,500 per annum or more, and to directors. The available information does not distinguish between shopping vouchers and other forms of voucher.

We are committed to the principle of National Insurance (NI) and take very seriously any form of abuse which undermines the integrity of the scheme. We shall look carefully at any pay practices adopted by employers to avoid payment of NI contributions and will take appropriate action against abuse. We will keep the position, including the economic impact on employees' households, under review.

Source: Inland Revenue Statistics 1996.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Primary Purpose Rule

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the timetable for conducting the review of the primary purpose rule; and what advice immigration officials are being given in the meantime on assessing such cases. [2401]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 5 June, *Official Report*, column *218*.

General Elections (Deposits)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce proposals to increase the deposit in general elections. [2471]

Mr. George Howarth: At this stage, we have no plans to increase the deposit for candidates at a parliamentary election.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the present sum the original £150 deposit for general elections introduced in 1918 would be if it had been increased in line with prices since that date; and what would be the equivalent percentage if the £500 deposit had been increased in line with prices since it was introduced. [2463]

Mr. Howarth: We estimate that the £150 deposit introduced in 1918 would now be equivalent to £4,093, if it had been increased in line with the inflation, which represents an 818.6 per cent. increase on the present deposit. The £500 deposit introduced in 1985 would be equivalent today to £825, an increase of 165 per cent. and £4,093 would represent an increase of 496 per cent. on that revalued deposit.

Entry Clearance Refusals (Appeals)

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reintroduce the right of appeal to those refused entry clearances to visit the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [2262]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 19 May, *Official Report*, column *7*.

Political and Special Advisers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the

terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2419]

Mr. Straw: My Department employs one political adviser, Ed Owen, previously employed as a journalist, and one special adviser, Norman Warner, who was previously employed as a consultant on social policy and public sector management. The terms and conditions of each appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Special advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned. These are personal appointments made by me, following consultation with the Prime Minister and with the permanent head of the Department.

Asylum Seekers

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what instructions he has given to the immigration authorities regarding the treatment of Albanian nationals already in the United Kingdom who have applied for asylum. [1526]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Since March, consideration of asylum applications by Albanian nationals and enforcement action in refused cases have been suspended. We are now satisfied that, while the situation remains tense and volatile in some parts of the country, the situation in other parts, including the capital Tirana, is sufficiently calm to make it safe to resume returns in appropriate cases. Consideration of outstanding asylum applications is also being resumed.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the cases transferred to the Criminal Cases Review Commission by his Department, indicating the date when these cases were first referred to his Department; [1032]

(2) if he will list the cases transferred to the Criminal Cases Review Commission in order of priority; to what extent the order of priority reflects the date when the case was first submitted; and what is the anticipated date for a decision on these cases. [1033]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 3 June 1997]:* A total of 261 individual cases were initially transferred to the Commission from the Home Office. It is not normal practice to make publicly available the names of petitioners. By virtue of paragraph 6 of schedule 1 to the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 it is a matter for the Commission to decide on its procedures, but I understand that 165 of the cases initially transferred to the Commission are already being worked on, and that work on the remaining cases will have begun by about the end of June.

"Civil Protection"

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the cost per edition of his Department's publication, "Civil Protection"; and what is the total cost of the editions produced to date, in 1997 prices; [1943]

(2) how many copies of each edition of his Department's publication, "Civil Protection", are produced; and of these how many are distributed in response to requests and how many are sent unsolicited. [1945]

Mr. George Howarth *[holding answer 5 June 1997]:* The latest edition, which was issued in May, cost £17,000 including distribution costs. The marginal cost of Home Office staff time spent on editorial functions is absorbed under other budgets. The total cost of the editions produced between 1991 and 1997 is £558,260 in 1997 prices. Figures for earlier years are not available. Around 40,000 copies of each edition are produced. To date, 34,700 copies of the latest edition have been issued in response to requests, including regular subscribers. No copies are sent unsolicited.

CABINET OFFICE

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Forth: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will list *(a)* the income, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his office; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2407]

Mr. Mandelson: The Minister without Portfolio does not have a political or special adviser paid out of public funds.

AGRICULTURE FISHERIES AND FOOD

Quarantine

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review the case for inoculation as a substitute for the quarantine of animals. [2363]

Mr. Rooker: Yes.

Political and Special Advisers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2422]

Mr. Morley: There are currently two political and special advisers to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. They are Ms Cathy McGlynn and Mr. T. Walker.

Both were previously policy advisers to the right hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham).

The terms and conditions of each appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

These are personal appointments by the Minister following consultation with the permanent head of the Department and the Prime Minister.

Beef Imports

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if SEAC terms of reference include the power to recommend a ban on beef imports into the United Kingdom. [2202]

Mr. Rooker: SEAC's terms of reference permit it to advise the Government on all matters concerned with spongiform encephalopathies. As such it is able to make whatever recommendations it regards as appropriate to safeguard public or animal health.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, in the absence of any variation in the beef ban, he will consider banning all imports of beef into the United Kingdom. [2203]

Mr. Rooker: No. I would however refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 5 June, *Official Report*, columns *227–28*.

BSE

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what checking mechanisms have been put in place by departmental officials to ensure that there is no BSE-contaminated feed either in store or trade circulation; [2204]

(2) what estimate he has made of the amount of BSE contaminated feed *(a)* in store and *(b)* in circulation in the United Kingdom. [2205]

Mr. Rooker: The State Veterinary Service (SVS) introduced a feed sampling programme in February 1996. Samples of feed and feed ingredients are taken from feed mills, farms using on-farm feed mixers and any site where feed, or ingredients for feed, are produced or stored. Feed samples are tested for the presence of ruminant and porcine protein using the compound feed ELISA test. Results of this surveillance activity are published in the monthly BSE Enforcement Bulletin and copies are available in the Library of the House.

In June last year, the feed recall scheme was launched to ensure that residual stocks of mammalian meat and bonemeal (MBM) were removed from farms, feed mills and feed merchants before the ban on possession came into effect last August. In all, over 11,000 tonnes of material was collected in the UK. This material is now in secure storage awaiting destruction. This material is not known to be contaminated with BSE—the controls on Specified Bovine Materials, requiring all tissues known to harbour BSE infectivity to be destroyed, were in place before the feed recall scheme was undertaken, considerably reduce the possibility of infectivity being present in the recalled feed.

Completed investigations into the results of the feed sampling programme which were positive and inconclusive (accounting for less than 2 per cent. of over 9,000 samples of the feed currently in circulation) have so far revealed no mammalian protein in ruminant rations or mammalian MBM in feed for farmed livestock.

Sheep Dips

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the effect of pyrethroid sheep dips on aquatic life in rivers and streams. [2240]

Mr. Rooker: No veterinary medicine is authorised for use unless it meets stringent statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Safety includes risk to the environment. The independent Scientific Veterinary Products Committee is currently undertaking a review of non-organophosphorus (OP) sheep dips to consider whether existing controls on OP dips should be extended to these products. The labels of authorised synthetic pyrethroid dips already carry clear warnings about the dangers to fish and other aquatic life. The labels also warn that it is an offence to pollute any stream or watercourse and advise farmer to contact the Environment Agency or the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency as appropriate, where there may be any doubt.

Poultry (USA)

Mr. Ivan Lewis: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will press the United States Department of Agriculture to end immediately its ban on the export of poultry to Europe. [2261]

Mr. Rooker: There is no ban by the United States Department of Agriculture on the export of poultry or poultry meat to Europe. Exports of poultry meat to the European Community must, however, be accompanied by an export health certificate authorised by an official veterinarian to the effect that the consignment meets Community import health requirements. US veterinarians will not authorise export health certificates for poultry meat and exports cannot therefore take place. Discussions between the European Commission, who have competence in this area, and the US authorities are continuing.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will publish the names of the political and special advisers appointed to her Department since the general election. [1627]

Mrs. Beckett: I have appointed Dan Corry and Sheila Watson to my Department as special advisers who will be paid from public funds.

In addition I have appointed Lord Hollick as an unpaid special adviser.

Alternative Energy Sources

Mr. Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what plans the Government have to review the current policy towards alternative energy sources; [1351]

(2) what plans the Government have to support efforts to refine existing forms of alternative energy to produce more electricity from the same resources; [1350]

(3) what plans the Government have to encourage off-shore windfarms. [1352]

Mr. Battle: The Government propose to undertake a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources in line with our manifesto commitment. To this end I anticipate reviewing policy including considerations of what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of UK's electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010 and how renewables can make an effective contribution to meeting requirements for future greenhouse gas reduction commitments. I will make a further announcement in due course. In the meantime the Government's new and renewable energy programme, currently underway will continue. I have already announced that I will initiate shortly a consultation exercise with the relevant trade bodies of the renewable energy industry, OFFER and the regional electricity companies on a fifth non-fossil fuel obligation (NFFO) order for renewable energy in England and Wales, leading to an announcement later in the year.

Windfarms

Mr. Evans: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) what is the capacity in MW of the current number of windfarms; [1353]

(2) how many windfarms are currently installed; and how many acres they cover in total. [1347]

Mr. Battle: At 31 March 1997, there were 42 windfarms in the United Kingdom with a total installed capacity of 283 Megawatts. Precise information about the area they cover is not available. However, estimates suggest that the area occupied by individual wind turbine towers can range between five and 20 square metres. For a wind farm consisting of twenty 500kW turbines, each covering an area of approximately 10 square metres, the total footprint would be about 200 square metres. Access tracks where required would occupy further land. The turbines might be placed within an area of about 1–2km^2 but the bulk of the site would be unaffected and could continue in its original use.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how many people have been employed in the aerospace industry in each year since 1992. [1638]

Mr. Battle: The number of people employed in the UK aerospace industry in each year from 1992 to 1995 are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1992	149,000
1993	126,000
1994	114,000
1995	108,000

Source:
Office for National Statistics (Annual Census of Production).

Research

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the Government's policy in respect of scientific and medical research. [1482]

Mr. Battle: The Government are committed to a strong science and engineering base and to the maintenance of its international position of excellence, as an essential underpinning resource both to our national economic future and to the quality of life. Research and development and the exploitation of its results will provide the answer to many of the problems faced by society: in health; in social issues; and in the environment. Medical research has a key role in that. Government have a crucial role to play as prime funder of curiosity-driven science, with its proven record of stimulating new innovations and enhancing our quality of life: and as facilitator and co-ordinator to ensure that the efforts of those engaged in scientific research are properly encouraged and developed in the nation's best interests Business has a responsibility for driving the research and development of new and improved products and services. We shall be seeking to:

use science and technology to improve our quality of life;

encourage new ideas and innovation to the market;

strengthen the voice of science in Government; and

end the bias against science in our culture.

We are committed to re-invigorating the science and engineering base and will be developing policy in the light of the report of the Dearing inquiry into higher education. I shall also be working with business and with colleagues across Government to sustain the health of science, engineering and technology in the UK, to maximise its contribution to economic competitiveness and the quality of life and to improve the way that science is used across Government to inform policy.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to promote further co-operation with the European Union in the field of scientific and medical research. [1484]

Mr. Battle: The Government attach great importance to co-operation with other members of the European Union in the field of scientific research. UK participants play an active role in the EU's Fourth Framework Programme (FP4) for Research and Technological Development which covers a wide range of scientific, technological and medical research. Negotiations concerning the content and organisation of the EU's Fifth Framework Programme, due to start in 1999, have recently begun. The UK has already played, and will continue to play, an active role in the shaping of this

future programme, to ensure that UK researchers and technologists have every opportunity to build upon their current, successful levels of participation.

Medical research is well provided for in the Commission proposals for FP5, particularly in the programme "Unlocking the Resources of the Living World", which is specifically aimed at improving the quality of life and for example, includes research: on the control of viral and other infectious diseases; the development of new antibiotics and anti-cancer agents; and the health effects of pollution.

Magnox Nuclear Liabilities

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimate she has made of the cost of *(a)* current Magnox nuclear liabilities and *(b)* future Magnox nuclear liabilities; and if she will set out the basis on which these estimates are made. [2228]

Mr. Battle: The estimated cost of meeting Magnox Electric's liabilities are given in the company's report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 1996 as £8.9 billion discounted at 3 per cent. real and £18.2 billion undiscounted. I understand that updated figures will be published in the company's report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 1997, which should be published in the next few months.

Hydrocarbon Reserves

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will commission an assessment of the environmental impact of continuing to explore and develop new hydrocarbon reserves; and if she will make a statement. [2126]

Mr. Battle: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee provides an assessment of the potential impact of hydrocarbons exploration and development on the environmental resources of areas before they are offered for licensing. On the basis of its advice, some areas may not be offered while others may have conditions applied to any licence to ensure that possible adverse impacts are minimised. These conditions may also require the provision of an environmental assessment by the licensee when preliminary work has identified the preferred location of a well or development and the probable characteristics of the project.

Nuclear Waste

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what was the number of escorts of nuclear waste by the UK Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary in 1996; if she will provide a breakdown of the cost of these escorts; and if she will make a statement. [2227]

Mr. Battle: Nuclear waste is not a category of nuclear material which requires to be escorted under the international recommendations, therefore no escorts were provided (or costs incurred) by the UK Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary in 1996 in this respect.

Nuclear Safety

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans the Government have to meet its new international obligations under the international nuclear safety convention; and if she will make a statement. [2231]

Mr. Battle: The Convention on Nuclear Safety was ratified by the United Kingdom on 17 January 1996 and entered into force on 24 October 1996. As a contracting party under the Convention, the United Kingdom will be required to produce a national report on how nuclear safety obligations are met in this country. These obligations include establishing a legislative and regulatory framework and ensuring that sufficient numbers of qualified staff are available throughout each nuclear installation's life. Steps must also be taken to ensure that design, construction and operation of civil nuclear power plant are safe, that safety assessments are carried out throughout the life of a nuclear installation and that emergency plans are routinely tested. In view of the stringent safety regime that the Government requires of the industry, we anticipate that the United Kingdom will have no difficulty in meeting these obligations.

National reports will be reviewed and discussed in detail by contracting parties at periodic review meetings, to be held at intervals of not more than three years. The first review meeting will be held at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna in April 1999.

Coal

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list her Department's current programmes for research into clean coal technology; and if she will make a statement. [1008]

Mr. Battle: My Department's research on clean coal technology is being undertaken in seven programme areas:

Coal Exploration and Extraction

Coal Preparation

Coal Handling and Supply

Coal Combustion in Conventional Utility Power Generation

Advanced Power Generation

Other Coal Conversion and Utilisation Processes

Technology Transfer and Commercialisation

Projects covering the seven programme areas are undertaken in collaboration with industry, universities and a number of overseas organisations. The results are disseminated via published project summaries and technical reports, including seminars, workshops and conferences. An annual report and newsletter is also published on developments in all the programme areas. The present phase of the programme is due to be completed in 1998.

A mid-term evaluation of the programme by an international panel of experts was undertaken in 1996 and a report of the evaluation published in July 1996. Industry provided evidence to the international panel which indicated that the programme benefits are a mixture of gross and net effects ranging from firm export orders and potential future sales of components, innovative mechanisms to reduce NO_x emissions, techniques to use more UK coals in steel making, etc., they do show the programme has been of significant value to UK industry. We are examining what other options there may be to support clean coal technology.

British Coal

Mr. Clapham: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what functions are still administered by British Coal; what functions previously performed by British Coal are now performed by (i) her Department and (ii) the Coal Authority; and when she expects British Coal to be finally wound up. [1695]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* British Coal remains responsible for the disposal of its remaining assets (principally property) and for the management of such liabilities as still remain with the Corporation (principally various personal injury claims).

British Coal's liability for the provision of concessionary fuel to ex-employees of British Coal and liability to make certain contributions to the former British Coal, pension schemes, was transferred to the Department in March 1995. The Department has also taken on responsibility for health and injury liabilities of former British Coal employees who transferred to private sector companies and the Coal Authority in respect of their past service with the Corporation.

The Coal Authority was established in September 1994 and has four main functions:

- licensing coal-mining operations and granting rights to exploit coal;
- handling coal-mining subsidence damage claims which are not the responsibility of licensees;
- managing property interests and historic liabilities; and
- holding and giving access to information on past, present and future coal mining and coal reserves.

It is anticipated that the DTI will take over the remaining management functions of the Corporation by the end of 1997. No decision has been taken on the date thereafter when the Corporation will be dissolved.

Plutonium Waste

Mr. MacShane: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what discussions she has had with British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. about the transfer by air of plutonium waste from Britain to Germany. [2180]

Mr. Battle: None. Arrangements for the transport of nuclear material from British Nuclear Fuels-owned sites is an operational matter for the company and its customers, subject to meeting regulatory requirements.

TREASURY

Tax Receipts

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish on a monthly basis for this financial year the actual receipts achieved for each of the taxes collected by the Inland Revenue. [1856]

(2) what estimate he has made of the receipts in each month of the present financial year from each of the taxes collected by the Inland Revenue. [1857]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 3 June 1997]:* Monthly receipts of taxes collected by the Inland revenue are first published in the monthly PSBR release and further detail is supplied in table 2.1c of *Financial Statistics*. Estimates of receipts are not published on a monthly basis.

Bank of England (Correspondence)

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the dates on which he has written to the Governor of the Bank of England; and if he will place a copy of each letter in the library. [2302]

Mrs. Liddell: The Chancellor wrote to the Governor on 6 May, setting out the new monetary policy arrangements, and on 20 May dealing with the future of banking supervision. Copies of both of these letters have been placed in the Library.

The Chancellor writes to the Governor from time to time on a range of matters, some of which are commercially confidential or market sensitive. It would not be appropriate to place such letters in the Library.

Full Employment

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate, based on the Treasury model of the economy, the level of interest rates and the weighted average exchange rate required to enable the economy to return to full employment at a high and sustainable rate of growth. [2283]

Mrs. Liddell: It has not, since 1978, been the practice to provide results from the Treasury model in response to Parliamentary Questions. The model is available for Members' use through the Library of the House.

Landowners (Tax Exemptions)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make publicly available the names and addresses of landowners who claim conditional exemption from inheritance tax or capital transfer tax because they allow public access to their land; [1106]

(2) what steps he takes to ensure that landowners conditionally exempt from inheritance tax publicise adequately the agreed public access requirement. [1105]

Dawn Primarolo: In return for conditional exemption for land or buildings, owners must undertake not only to allow reasonable public access to the property but also to maintain and preserve its character. A number of agencies advise the Inland Revenue on matters concerning eligibility for exemption. The relevant agency also negotiates and agrees with each owner the arrangements covering the maintenance, preservation and public access aspects, including the appropriate level and nature of publicity about access.

Owners' compliance with their agreed undertakings is regularly monitored by the Inland Revenue and the heritage agencies. Any breach of the undertakings may result in the loss of the exemption and the payment of the deferred tax charge.

Information about the names and addresses of owners of land conditionally exempted from inheritance tax or capital transfer tax is, like other information about taxpayers, covered by the confidentiality provisions of section 182 of the Finance Act 1989.

Integrated Services Digital Network

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to propose the inclusion in the draft directive on integrated services digital network a statement that the directive will not apply to communications relating to financial services. [1220]

Mrs. Liddell: It is intended that the directive will apply to financial services. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade is aware of the concerns raised by the financial services industry and its regulators. The Government are seeking to balance the interaction between investor protection and industry practice with the need for adequate data protection.

Insider Trading

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government propose to take to stop insider trading; and if he will introduce legislation *(a)* requiring public companies to provide notification to their shareholders of significant changes in their circumstances to reach them not later than the information is released to the Stock Exchange and *(b)* prohibiting meetings with representatives of such companies by investment analysts enabling the analysts to acquire information about a company earlier than the company's private shareholders. [2128]

Mrs. Liddell: The Criminal Justice Act 1993 makes it a criminal offence to engage in insider dealing in the UK. The Government will keep the scope and effectiveness of this legislation under review. But we have no plans to introduce the additional legislation suggested. The Stock Exchange Listing Rules already place a duty on listed companies to make price sensitive information available to their shareholders and other members of the public on the same basis.

Manufactures

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the Treasury's forecast of the change in the volume of production, imports and exports of manufactures in each of the next five years as a result of the rise in interest rates and the exchange rate since 1994. [2290]

Mrs. Liddell: It is not possible to isolate with confidence the effects of changes in interest rates and the exchange rate from the various other factors affecting changes in manufacturing output, exports and imports. The next Treasury forecast will be published on 2 July 1997.

November Budget

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what remit he has given to the National Audit Office when asking them to report on the economic assumptions underlying last November's Budget. [2165]

Mrs. Liddell: In order to assist the Government in preparing their forecast of the public finances, the National Audit Office has been invited to review the assumptions adopted for economic growth, unemployment and interest rates and the conventions used for projecting proceeds from privatisation and from "spend to save" expenditure measures. A report will be published before the Budget.

Insurance Industry

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the implications of his oral statement of 20 May, *Official Report*, columns *508–11*, as regards departmental responsibilities for the insurance industry. [1123]

Mrs. Liddell: The statement did not cover this matter.

Bank of England

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the total of ways and means advances from the Bank of England to Her Majesty's Government at the end of each financial year since 1990–91. [1448]

Mrs. Liddell: Outstanding ways and means advances from Issue Department at the Bank of England to the National Loans Fund at the end of each financial year since 1990–91 are set out in the table.

Date (end of financial year)	*Outstanding ways and means advances from Issue Department (£ millions)*
1990–91	6,918
1991–92	7,187
1992–93	3,062
1993–94	6,750
1994–95	15,904
1995–96	15,654
1996–97	14,322

Public Sector Deficit

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer to what extent he is currently over or under funding the public sector deficit. [1530]

Mrs. Liddell: From 1996–97 the funding rule was replaced by a target to finance the Central Government Borrowing Requirement (CGBR) plus maturing gilts and any net increase in the foreign exchange reserves through debt sales. The latest estimate of the 1996–97 financing requirement is £39.4 billion, of which £25.1 billion is to finance the CGBR, £12.4 billion is to finance gilt redemptions, and the remaining £1.9 billion is to finance the net change in foreign reserves and financing carry-over from 1995–96. Gilts sales in 1996–97 amounted to some £38.8 billion, sales of National Savings products £4.8 billion, and there was negative financing of £0.4 billion from sales of other public debt. Overall there was therefore a £3.9 billion excess of gilt sales relative to the final gilt sales requirement.

Mortgage tax Relief

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will investigate the German system of mortgage tax relief for first-time buyers of homes as an alternative to MIRAS. [2089]

Mrs. Liddell: Whilst I am aware of the general German system of tax relief on home purchase I do not know of any special arrangements for first-time buyers. My officials will therefore seek to obtain details of these.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what means his Department makes available it publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1675]

Mr. Dewar: Publications in Braille and audio tape are made available and publicised through the Scottish Braille Press who distribute them to individuals and organisations for the visually impaired throughout Scotland. My Department does not currently produce publications in large print. We are, however, presently considering how we might increase the range of information in alternative formats for people who are visually impaired.

Speeding

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount raised through the payment of fixed penalties for speeding in each of the last five financial years, for each police force in Scotland; and if there has been any change of policy by the police forces regarding the collection of speeding fines during the past five years. [1284]

Mr. McLeish: Police fixed penalties for speeding were only introduced in April 1993 and have been set at £40 since then. The following table gives the information held centrally on the number of police conditional offers of fixed penalties for speeding issued in each of the last three financial years, for each police force in Scotland. The fixed penalties are collected by the Clerk of the District Court with jurisdiction over locus of the offence. It is not possible from information held centrally to give the total amounts raised from fixed penalties for speeding in each police force area for the period covered in the table.

Number of police conditional offers issued under section 75(3) of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988 in relation to speeding offences, 1993–94 to 1995–96

Police Force	*Offers issued*		
	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Central	3,248	3,913	3,716
Dumfries and Galloway	3,032	2,931	4,478
Fife	3,576	3,686	3,111
Grampian	5,528	7,275	6,892
Lothian and Borders	8,628	11,298	10,873
Northern	2,266	2,749	3,479
Strathclyde	36,675	30,247	27,651
Tayside	6,071	5,730	5,210
Scotland	69,024	67,829	65,410

HEALTH

Dental Services

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Government are currently taking to ensure the retention of qualified dentists in the general dental service; and if he will make a statement. [1890]

Mr. Milburn: This area is under review.

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the total amounts claimed for dental treatments from the Dental Practice Board in each of the last five years in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the relationship between these figures and the numbers of general dental practitioners in the same periods. [1894]

Mr. Milburn: Information on payments scheduled by the Dental Practice Board for England and Wales is given in the table. Questions relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland, for Wales and for Northern Ireland respectively. The table includes figures for the number of general dental practitioners on health authority lists.

General dental service: Scheduled gross payments to dentists for item of service and number of dentists—1992–93 to 1996–97

England and Wales

	England		*Wales*	
	Item of service payments £ million[1]	*Number of dentists*[2]	*Item of service payments £ million*[1]	*Number of dentists*[2]
1992–93	966.6	15,618	53.4	831
1993–94	884.3	16,020	48.7	858
1994–95	925.3	15,745	49.8	850
1995–96	931.5	15,998	49.5	855
1996–97	951.3	16,387	51.1	913

[1] Most child treatments were paid for through capitation payments until September 1996. Therefore the item of service figures do not give a true reflection of the amount of child treatment carried out. The figures include entry payments.

[2] These figures are a headcount of the number of different dentists on Health Authority lists. They exclude community salaried and hospital dentists.

Capital Investment

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total amount of money currently spent to assist in capital investment in general medical practices; what were the figures in each of the last five financial years; and what are the figures for capital investment in dental practices. [1892]

Mr. Milburn: It is not possible to identify separately the total amounts paid to general medical practitioners and general dental practitioners to support capital investment.

Sunderland Hospitals (Name Change)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total cost to the Sunderland Hospital Trust of changing the name of Sunderland District General hospital to the Sunderland Royal hospital. [2461]

Mr. Milburn: Sunderland District General hospital was recently renamed Sunderland Royal hospital to reflect its royal designation. The change reflects the hospital's links with Sunderland Royal Infirmary, which closed in 1995 when services were transferred to more modern buildings at the District General Hospital. We understand from City Hospitals Sunderland National Health Service Trust that the costs of the title transfer were at around £1,000 and were paid from non-exchequer funds.

Political and Special Advisers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2425]

Mr. Dobson: I have appointed Mr. Joe McCrea as my special adviser. He was previously my research assistant. The terms and conditions of his appointment are set out in the draft model contract, copies of which have been placed in the Library.

Special advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

This is a personal appointment made by me following consultation with the permanent head of the Department and the Prime Minister.

Silicone Breast Implants

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the review of the use of silicone breast implants to be completed; and if he will make a statement. [2299]

Mr. Boateng: The Independent Review Group aims to report to the Chief Medical Officer in late 1997. The completion date for the review will, however, depend on the amount of work that the Group considers necessary to fulfil the remit.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Schengen Agreement

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will deposit a copy of the full Schengen agreement text in the Library prior to the signature of the treaty of Amsterdam. [2009]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Schengen Agreement is not a Treaty to which this country is a party, nor is it an EC or EU document. We will consider whether to deposit the Schengen Agreement in the Libraries of the House in the light of developments in the IGC negotiations.

Human Rights

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the current British interpretation of human rights with the draft Amsterdam treaty, with particular reference to the use of the term "fundamental freedoms" in article F of the draft treaty. [1995]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We consider the use of the term human rights and fundamental freedoms in the draft Treaty to be fully compatible with the UK's understanding of that term.

Algeria

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to send a British team to monitor the Algerian elections. [1583]

Mr. Fatchett: The UK contributed two observers to the United Nations co-ordinated team which monitored the Legislative Elections in Algeria which took place on 5 June 1997.

NATO (Sintra Meeting)

Mr. Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of *(a)* the meeting in Paris on 27 May between NATO Heads of State and Government and the Russian President and *(b)* the North Atlantic Council meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers at Sintra on 29 and 30 May. [2847]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: In Paris my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister signed, with his NATO colleagues, the President of Russia, and the NATO Secretary-General, the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Co-operation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation. This is an historic document designed to encourage greater trust and co-operation between Russia and NATO.

The main provisions of the Act are:

- a list of shared principles, including the right of States to choose the means to ensure their own security;
- arrangements for a Permanent Joint Council which will meet monthly at the level of Ambassadors, twice yearly at Ministerial level, and on demand in a crisis;
- consultation and co-operation over security crises, crisis management and conflict resolution, joint operations, defence policy and military doctrine and arms control;
- an agreed approach to the adaption of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe and provisions for more co-operation between military establishments.

The NATO Foreign Ministers in Sintra had a preliminary discussion on decisions to be taken at the NATO Summit meeting in Madrid on 8 July. In particular they discussed NATO enlargement but did not reach conclusions on which of the applicants for membership will be invited to join the Alliance at Madrid. That decision will be taken by Allied Governments in time for the Summit.

Foreign Ministers also initialled a draft NATO/Ukraine Charter which will provide a basis for enhanced co-operation symbolising NATO's recognition of the importance of Ukraine's sovereignty and independence.

On 30 May NATO Foreign Ministers and the 27 Partner countries launched the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and an expansion of NATO's programme with Partners, Partnership for Peace. The enhanced Partnership for Peace encourages Partners to plan, train for and mount the full range of peacekeeping operations including the most demanding. The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council will also provide a political forum for discussing Partnership activities, and wider issues of European security.

Copies of the NATO Russian Founding Act have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

European Union

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for June; and if he will list major EU events for the next six months. [2848]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The following is the information:

Monthly forecast of business for June 1997

The following Councils are scheduled:

2–3 June: General Affairs Council

5 June: Health Council

5 June: Development Council

9 June: Ecofin Council

10 June: General Affairs Council (tbc)

12 June: Social Affairs Council

16–17 June: European Council

17–18 June: Transport Council

19–20: Environment Council

23–25: Agriculture Council

26 June: Education Council

26 June: General Affairs Council

27 June: Energy Council

27 June: Telecommunications Council

30 June: Culture Council

The following subjects are likely to be discussed:

June 2–3: General affairs council

Approval of list of A points.

EP Resolutions of 23–24 April and 12–16 May.

Preparation of European Council in Amsterdam (Procedural Point).

Trade issues:

Council Declaration on market access for least developed countries.

Leghold Traps.

Racism and Xenophobia Monitoring Centre.

Transatlantic Relations: Report on EU/US Summit.

EU/Japan Summit (Information Point).

EU/Hong Kong: After 1997: Council Conclusions.

OCT Mid-Term Review.

Former Yugoslavia.

Albania.

Middle East Peace Process (possible item).

Any other business.

June 5: Health council

Adoption of the provisional agenda.

Adoption of the list of A points.

Communicable diseases network: common position.

EU/US Task Force on communicable diseases.

Draft Resolution on human organs and tissues.

Draft Resolution on migrant doctors within the European Union.

Draft Conclusions on health aspects of the drug problem.

TSEs: orientation debate.

Blood and blood products: follow-up to the Council Resolution of 12 November 1996.

Commission Communication on combatting tobacco consumption: orientation debate.

Commission proposals for programmes on rare diseases, pollution related diseases and accidents and injuries: presentation by the Commission.

presentation by the Commission.

Future framework for action public health: orientation debate.

Any other business:

Promotion of mental health (request by the Finnish Delegation).

Health safety of medical equipment (request by the French delegation).

June 5: Development Council

EU/ACP relations:

Future EU relations with the developing countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific;

Democratisation, rule of law and human rights in the ACP countries;

Commission communication on support for structural adjustment and debt relief in heavily indebted ACP countries.

Conclusions on indigenous peoples (false B point).

Follow-up to 1992 Horizon 2000 declaration:

Resolution on coherence (false B point);

Conclusions on operational coherence (false B point).

Resolution on research and technological development in relation with the EU's development co-operation policy (false B point).

Resolution on the Joint Evaluation of Programme Food Aid (A point).

Conclusions on the Court of Auditors' report concerning the Humanitarian Aid of the European Union (A point).

Proposal for a Council regulation on NGO co-financing: adoption of common position.

Follow-up to Social Summit: Commission presentation.

Any other business:

Report on co-operation with Asia and Latin America (ALA) developing countries from 1991–95;

Reform of the UN organisations in the economic and social spheres.

Follow-up to Development Assistance Committee (DAC) on EC aid.

June 9: ECOFIN Council

Approval of the agenda.

Approval of the list of A items.

Preparation of stage III of EMU: Stability Pact, legal framework for the euro, resolution on ERM II.

Implementation of Broad Economic Guidelines 1996.

Draft Broad Economic Guidelines 1997.

Euro Coins: technical characteristics and design.

Interim report on Employment.

Progress report on SEM 2000.

Fraud: Commission work programme 1997–98, Fight against Fraud report 1996.

Derogations on mineral oils excise duties.

Preparation of Luxembourg Presidency.

Preparation of Structured Dialogue with CEEC and Baltic Ministers.

Any Other Business:

Settlement Finality Directive.

June 10: General Affairs Council

Council not yet confirmed.

June 12: Social Affairs Council

Adoption of the agenda.

Approval of the list of A points (possible item).

Proposal for a Council Directive on the burden of proof in cases of discrimination based on sex.

Proposal for a Council Directive on the protection of the health and safety of workers from the risks related to chemical agents at work.

Interim 1997 joint report on employment for the Amsterdam European Council.

Follow-up to the French memorandum on a European Social model.

Commission communication on modernising and improving social protection in the European Union.

Final report by the working party of experts on European systems of worker involvement (with regard to the European Company Statute and other pending proposals).

Industrial restructuring and informing and consulting workers at community level.

Social Dialogue.

Any Other Business:

Commission report on access to continuing training in the Union;

Implementation of the European Social Fund Budget.

June 16/17: European Council

Agenda not yet available.

June 17/18: Transport Council

Directive on safety assessment of third country aircraft: political agreement.

Air Traffic Management: debate and Council conclusions.

European Aviation Safety Authority: debate and Council conclusions.

Directive on Heavy Goods Vehicle taxation, charging and tolls: political agreement.

Amending Regulation on tachographs: common position.

Road telematics: Council conclusions.

Trans-European Rail Freight Freeways: possible conclusions.

Road safety: debate and conclusions.

Amending Directive on Seafarer Training: common position.

Directive on registration of ferry passengers: common position.

Maritime external relations, including proposed mandates for negotiations with India and China: debate based on questionnaire.

Short Sea Shipping: Council conclusions.

Any other business:

Duty Free Sales: statement by Finland;

Week-end lorry bans: statement by Netherlands;

EU/US Aviation negotiations: Commission Report;

Aviation negotiations with Central and Eastern European Countries: Commission Report;

TENs and public, private partnerships: Commission Report.

June 19/20: Environment Council

Agenda not yet available.

June 23–25: Agriculture Council

Agricultural price fixing.

Arable penalties.

EU/Czech veterinary equivalence agreement (possible item).

EU/US veterinary equivalence agreement (possible item).

Quality feet promotion (possible item).

Apple, pear, peach and nectarine tree grubbing up scheme (possible item).

Hops (possible item).

Farm Accountancy Data Network (possible item).

Italian state aid for co-operatives (possible item).

Export refund/animal welfare linkage (possible item).

Pesticide maximum residue levels (possible item).

Hormones—WTO panel (possible item).

Potato brown rot (possible item).

June 26: Education Council

Adoption of a common position on a Commission proposal to increase the budget of the SOCRATES education programme.

Adoption of Council Conclusions on safety at school.

Adoption of Council Conclusions on information and communications technology (ICT) and teacher training.

Adoption of Council Conclusions on the Commission White Paper "Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society".

Commission presentation on a forthcoming draft Recommendation on quality assurance in higher education.

Open Ministerial debate on the Commission Green Paper on Barriers to Student, Trainee and Researcher Mobility.

Discussion of a Dutch paper on regional languages.

Discussion of socio-economic research under the new 5th Research and Development Framework Programme.

June 26: General Affairs Council

First draft agenda—likely to change.

Follow-up to the European Council at Amsterdam.

Former Yugoslavia.

Middle East Peace Process.

Relations with Andorra.

Mediterranean Policy.

Relations with Albania.

Relations with Yemen.

Relations with Turkmenistan.

Relations with Switzerland.

June 26: Energy Council

Agenda not yet known.

June 27: Telecommunications Council

Commission communication on a European Union Action Plan for satellite communications in the Information Society: Council conclusions.

Commission communication regarding the consultation on the Green Paper on a Numbering Policy for Telecommunications Services in Europe: Council resolution.

Proposal for a Council and European Parliament Directive on communications terminal equipment: orientation debate.

Commission communication on progress in implementing the telecommunications regulatory framework by 1 January 1998: Commission report and exchange of views.

Commission communication on further developments in mobile and cordless communications in Europe: Commission presentation.

June 30: Culture Council

Agenda not yet known.

This calendar is primarily concerned with European Union matters, but certain other relevant events are also included. Events and dates quoted are based on the information available on the date of issue.

European calendar: June to November 1997

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
June 1997		
2–3	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council (and IGC Ministerial)
5	Luxembourg	Health Council
5	Luxembourg	Development Council
9	Luxembourg	Ecofin Council
9–13	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
10	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council (tbc)
12	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
16–17	Amsterdam	European Council

European calendar: June to November 1997

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
17–18	Luxembourg	Transport Council
19–20	Luxembourg	Environment Council
20–22	Denver	G7 Summit
23–25	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
24	Brussels	Political Committee
25–26	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
26	Luxembourg	Education Council
26	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
27	Luxembourg	Energy Council
27	Luxembourg	Telecommunications Council
30	Luxembourg	Culture Council
July 1997		
1		Luxembourg Presidency begins
3	Luxembourg	Visit by Commission
4–5	Echternach	Labour and Social Affairs Council (Informal) (tbc)
7	Brussels	Ecofin Council
10–11	Luxembourg	Political Committee
14–18	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
22	Brussels	Agriculture Council
22–23	Brussels	General Affairs Council
24	Brussels	Budget Council
26	?	Possible European Council
August 1997		
There are no events scheduled for August		
September 1997		
4	Brussels	Political Committee
7–9	Echternach	Agriculture Council (Informal)
12–14	Mondorf	Ecofin Council (Informal)
15–16	Brussels	General Affairs Council
15–19	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
22	New York	Political Committee
22–23	Brussels	Agriculture Council
29	Brussels	Political Committee (reserve date—tbc)
October 1997		
1–2	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
2	Luxembourg	Telecommunications Council
3–4	Echternach	Internal Market Council (Informal)
6–7	Luxembourg	General Affairs Council
7	Luxembourg	Social Affairs Council
9	Luxembourg	Transport Council
9–10	Echternach	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Informal)

European calendar: June to November 1997

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
10–11	Strasbourg	Council of Europe Summit
13	Luxembourg	Ecofin Council
16	Brussels	Political Committee
16–17	Luxembourg	Possible European Council
16 or 26	Luxembourg	Environment Council (tbc)
20–21	Luxembourg	Political Committee
20–21	Luxembourg	Agriculture Council
20–24	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
23	Luxembourg	Environment Council
24–27	Edinburgh	CHOGM
25–26	Mondorf	Foreign Ministers (Informal)
30	Luxembourg	Fisheries Council
November 1997		
3	Brussels	Consumer Council
3	Brussels	Political Committee
5–6	Brussels	European Parliament Plenary
10	Brussels	Research Council
13	Brussels	Industry Council
17	Brussels	Ecofin Council
17	Brussels	Political Committee
17–18	Brussels	Agriculture Council
17–21	Strasbourg	European Parliament Plenary
19	Brussels	Fisheries Council (tbc)
20	Brussels	Education Council
21	Brussels	Budget Council
24	Brussels	Culture Council
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs Council
27	Brussels	Internal Market and Development Council

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the situation of ethnic Albanians who have fled Kosovo and Montenegro and sought asylum in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [1213]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

Various representations have been made, primarily in the context of individual asylum applications. Each asylum application is considered individually on its merits, in the light of the current situation in Kosovo and Montenegro, and asylum is granted where appropriate.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 9 June 1997

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Entry Clearance

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people are awaiting entry clearance to join their families in the United Kingdom from Bangladesh. [1899]

Mr. Fatchett: On 3 June 3,733 people were awaiting entry clearance for settlement to join their families in the United Kingdom from Bangladesh.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people from India are awaiting entry clearance to join their families in the United Kingdom. [1900]

Mr. Fatchett: Posts in India are in the process of collating the information required. I will write to the hon. Member when the answer is complete.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people from Pakistan are awaiting entry clearance to join their families in the United Kingdom. [1901]

Mr. Fatchett: On 4 June 3,470 people from Pakistan were awaiting entry clearance for settlement to join their families in the United Kingdom.

Amsterdam Summit

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the policy that Her Majesty's Government will adopt at Amsterdam regarding the proposed new article 6a to the treaty of the European Community. [2168]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We support the draft article.

Visitor's Visas (Tunisians)

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Tunisians were *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful in obtaining a visitor's visa to enter the United Kingdom in 1996; and of those who were successful, how many were unmarried. [2186]

Mr. Fatchett: In 1996, 2,416 Tunisian nationals were issued visitors visas by the British Embassy in Tunis. A total of 406 visit applications were refused. The number of Tunisian applicants issued and refused visit visas worldwide and the numbers of those who were married is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Nigeria

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning relations between Britain and Nigeria. [2445]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Britain has a long-standing and close association with Nigeria and its people which continues. We are determined to ensure that their human rights are respected. We will need to see real progress towards the restoration of accountable, democratic government and respect for human rights, before our relations with the Nigerian regime can improve.

St. Helena

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will name the previous five governors of St. Helena; and in each case list their subsequent two career moves. [1095]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The previous five Governors of St. Helena and their subsequent two career moves are as follows:

(i) Geoffrey Guy CMG, CVO, OBE (1976–81). Retired from Diplomatic Service on departing St. Helena.

(ii) John Massingham CMG (1981–85). High Commissioner Georgetown 1985–87, Consul General Johannesburg 1987–89.

(iii) Francis Baker CBE, OBE (1984–88). Has worked in private industry since departing St. Helena.

(iv) Robert Stimson CMG (1988–91). Retired from Diplomatic Service on departing St. Helena.

(v) Alan Hoole OBE (1991–95). Governor of Anguilla 1995 to May 1997.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the High Commission takes to maintain contact with, and provide information to, British passport holders resident in Zimbabwe. [1966]

Mr. Fatchett: Our High Commission in Harare maintains contact with British residents in Zimbabwe through its Consular offices in Harare and annual Consular surgeries in Bulawayo and elsewhere. The High Commission also has a network of Consular Correspondents and have close links with the Zimbabwe Britain Society.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid her Department allocates to Zimbabwe; if she will list the projects supported; and what checks her Department carries out to ensure the aid is deployed in accordance with its policy. [1965]

Clare Short: A Country Aid Programme Statement for Zimbabwe was issued in April 1996. I am also placing a list of current projects in the Library of the House. The projects are appraised and monitored by the Department's Development Division in Central Africa, which is based in Harare. In 1995–96 the total expenditure on the programme was £14.8 million.

Biodiversity

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what initiatives her Department will be pursuing at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session to further the work of the Biodiversity convention. [2218]

Clare Short: My Department is committed to helping developing countries to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity. We are still considering, with colleagues in Whitehall, what initiatives might be announced at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session.

UNESCO

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what will be the Government's contribution to UNESCO once it resumes membership on 1 July. [2161]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Richmond Park, (*Hansard* 2 June 1997, volume 295 column 26) and to the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham, (*Hansard* 20 May 1997, volume 294 column 37).

Indonesia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if it is her policy to provide aid to Indonesia for projects of general application which treat East Timor as a province of Indonesia. [2268]

Clare Short: No aid given by us to Indonesia implies recognition of sovereignty over East Timor. Whether any future project of general application might affect East Timor would be a matter for consideration in each case.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the *(a)* allocated and *(b)* actual expenditure on each aid-and-trade provision project in Indonesia for each of the financial years since 1993–94. [2271]

Clare Short: The table below shows the Aid and Trade Provision projects in Indonesia for which aid agreements have been concluded since 1993. The table also shows expenditure to date. None of these projects has yet been completed.

Project	*Date of agreement*	*ATP value (£ million)*	*Expenditure to date (£ million)*
150/500Kv Substations	10 August 1995	15.516	12.978
Samarinda Power Station	6 March 1995	12.570	9.844
Samarinda Transmission Line	10 May 1995	1.600	1.359
Piston Engine Research Laboratory	12 January 1996	4.640	2.335
Science and Technology Equipment	6 September 1996	4.340	2.491
Science and Technology Equipment	6 September 1996	0.550	0.035

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the aid-and-trade provision project agreements concluded with the Indonesian authorities since 1991, listing for each project *(a)* the date of the agreement and the expected completion date, *(b)* the type of agreement, *(c)* the contract value and ATP value, *(d)* the United Kingdom company and Indonesian authority involved and *(e)* the sector involved. [2270]

Clare Short: Details of all Aid and Trade projects in Indonesia on which agreements have been concluded since 1991 are set out below.

Project	*Indonesian Authority*	*UK Company*	*Agreement Date*	*Type of Agreement*	*Project Completion date*	*Contract value (£ million)*	*ATP value (£ million)*	*Sector*
Auto Industry Development Study	Ministry of Communications	De Monfort Management Ltd.	7 Janaury 1991	ATP/TC	1991	0.49	0.49	Transport
Western Universities Equipment	Directorate General of Higher Education	Philip Harris International/ Gallenkamp	14 May 1991	Soft Loan	[1]2,016	14.28	13.67	Misc.
Steel Bridging II	Ministry of Public Works	Mabey and Johnson	22 May 1991	Soft Loan	[1]2,016	3.83	3.67	Transport
Flight Simulator	Merpati Nusantara	Aeronautical Systems Designers	20 June 1991	Soft Loan	[1]2,016	4.97	4.66	Transport
Bali and Medan Airport Security	Ministry of National Development Planning	IAL International Aeradio Ltd.	21 August 1991	Soft Loan	[1]2,016	11.45	10.46	Misc.
Jambi Power Station	Ministry of National Development Planning	Mirrlees Blackstone (STPT) Ltd.	21 August 1991	Soft Loan	[1]2,016	5.74	5.35	Power
Cikampek–Padalarang Toll Road Design Study	Ministry of Communications	Cementation	15 October 1991	ATP/TC	1992	1.7	1.7	Transport
Western Universities Training Centre	Directorate General of Higher Education	Sunderland Engineering Education Services	29 August 1992	ATP/TC	1996	2.21	2.21	Education
Flight Simulator Consultancy	Ministry of Communications	Civil Aviation Authority	24 Janaury 1992	ATP/TC	1996	0.39	0.39	Transport
Samarinda Power Station	Perusahaan Umum Listrik Negara	Rolls Royce	6 March 1995	Soft Loan	[2]1998	45.81	12.57	Power
Samarinda Transmission Line	Perusahaan Umum Listrik Negara	Clough Smith	10 May 1995	Soft Loan	[2]1998	4.24	1.60	Power

Project	Indonesian Authority	UK Company	Agreement Date	Type of Agreement	Project Completion date	Contract value (£ million)	ATP value (£ million)	Sector
150/1500KV Substation Project	P.T. Perusahaan Listrik Negara (Persero)	GEC Alsthom	10 August 1995	Mixed Credits	[2]1998	46.81	15.52	Power
Piston Engines Research Laboratory	Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology	G. Cussons Ltd.	12 Janaury 1996	Soft Loan	[2]1999	14.76	4.64	Science and Technology
Science and Technology Project, Java Universities	Ministry of Education	Phillip Harris International Ltd.	15 March 1996	Soft Loan	[2]1998	14.13	4.5	Education

Notes:
[1] These projects have been physically completed, but disbursements will continue over the length of the full loan period (25 years).
[2] These dates are provisional and final completion will depend on satisfactory progress with imnplementation.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the future provision of aid-and-trade provision assistance to Indonesia. [2272]

Clare Short: As I explained to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby on 21 May, we will be reviewing all our expenditure programmes to ensure that we concentrate our efforts on poverty eradication. This means that we will be reviewing the Aid and trade Provision; and any review of ATP will naturally look at how it has operated in Indonesia, and whether it should continue to do so.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what training or assistance is currently being provided by her Department to the Indonesian police force; and if she will make a statement about the future provision of aid to the Indonesian police force. [2269]

Clare Short: Assistance to the Indonesian police force ended in March 1996. No further assistance is planned.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what representations her Department will make at the forthcoming meeting of the Consultativie Group on Indonesia on *(a)* East Timor, *(b)* human rights and *(c)* good governance; [2273]

(2) what level of aid commitment her Department plans to make at the forthcoming meeting of the Consultative Group on Indonesia; and if she will make a statement about the extent to which the aid commitment will be dependent on the improvement of human rights in Indonesia and East Timor. [2274]

Clare Short: We shall take every opportunity to make known to the Indonesian Government our concerns about these issues. As to future commitments this will be covered by the review I propose to undertake. *Hansard,* Volume 294, Col. 93 of 21 May refers.

Military Equipment Sales

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the machinery which will be put in place to ensure that her Department is able to make representations to other departments on the impact on development of the sale of military equipment to developing countries *(a)* in general terms and *(b)* in respect of specific export licence applications. [2275]

Clare Short: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary announced on 22 May *Hansard* column 135, we have initiated the urgent review of the detailed criteria used in considering licence applications for the export of conventional arms. This review will include the role of all Departments involved, including my own Department. This new criteria will be made available to the House when the review is complete.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the steps she will take to ensure that assistance provided by her Department is not linked to the sale of military equipment to that country. [2276]

Clare Short: This Government will never link sales of military equipment to the provision of British development assistance, either directly or indirectly.

CABINET OFFICE

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister without Portfolio if he will list the Cabinet committees *(a)* of which he is a member and *(b)* which he chairs. [2560]

Mr. Mandelson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Key Stage 2 Results Booklet

Audrey Wise: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many copies of the booklet "Primary School Performance Tables 1996 Key Stage 2 Results", were distributed to schools; and how much this cost. [2135]

Dr. Howells: An initial total of 1.12 million copies of the booklets were sent to primary and nursery schools in England on the date of publication at a cost of £264,000 for production and £236,000 for distribution. Schools were invited to request further copies according to their needs. Copies were also available to the public and it is not possible to separate schools' requests from those of the public.

European Convention on Human Rights (Disabled People)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the implications for disabled people of signing the European Convention on Human Rights. [2172]

Mr. Alan Howarth: We will introduce a Bill to incorporate the main provisions of the convention into domestic law. This will enable our domestic courts to consider claims that the rights of disabled people (and others) under the convention have been violated.

School Discipline

Liz Blackman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what action he proposes to take in support of teachers and schools confronted by persistent poor behaviour on the part of a small number of pupils. [2181]

Ms Estelle Morris: Following wide consultation, we will issue detailed new guidance for schools and local education authorities, including advice on good practice, to accompany implementation of the discipline provisions in the Education Act 1997. We will support locally devised projects to tackle behaviour problems under the grants for education support and training (GEST) programme, and will take more active steps to disseminate examples of good practice emerging from these projects.

School Deficits

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment whether school deficits, actual and projected have been included in the public sector borrowing requirement calculation, for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98. [2206]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* The public sector borrowing requirement does not take account of the net deficit or surplus of funds held by schools.

TREASURY

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Spring: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to prevent the importation of illegal drugs into the United Kingdom. [923]

Dawn Primarolo: Lead responsibility for preventing the importation of illicit drugs rests with HM Customs and Excise. The department's current Management Plan, a copy of which has been placed in the Library, gives details of how it will be taking its work forward over the period to 1999–2000. Tackling drugs smuggling is the department's top anti-smuggling priority.

In recent years the department has moved to a system of flexible, mobile controls that are carefully targeted on the areas of greatest risk. It is making increased use of intelligence to target major criminals and drug smuggling organisations, and is currently implementing a range of measures to maximise its effectiveness in depriving drug traffickers of the proceeds of their crimes. A key element in the department's approach is close co-operation with other UK agencies involved in the fight against drugs, including the police. The department is also active in fostering co-operation with overseas law enforcement agencies and the business community. Other measures under development include improved risk assessment, further steps to optimise the deployment of resources and the provision of better information for anti-smuggling staff.

In 1996–97 the department prevented drugs to a street value of more than £1.5 billion from entering the UK, while dismantling or significantly disrupting 100 smuggling organisations.

Tax Returns

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of tax returns were received by the Inland Revenue more than 12 months after the date of issue. [2131]

Dawn Primarolo: An exercise carried out for the 1995–96 tax year indicated that the percentage of returns outstanding 12 months after issue was as follows:

Type of individual taxpayer served with a return	*Percentage of returns still outstanding 12 months after issue*
Directors, employees and pensioners	3
Self employed individuals	23

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of tax returns were received by the Inland Revenue *(a)* prior to 31 October, *(b)* between 1 November and 31 January and *(c)* between 1 February and 5 April following the end of the tax year. [2129]

Dawn Primarolo: An exercise conducted for the 1995–96 tax year indicated that the percentage of tax returns received was as follows:

Type of individual taxpayer served with a return	*Percentage of tax returns received by Inland Revenue*		
	Prior to 31 October	*1 November to 31 January*	*1 February to 5 April*
Directors, employees and pensioners	86	9	2
Self employed individuals	62	13	2

Price Stability

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the requirements of the Maastricht treaty as regards price stability following monetary union. [499]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Article 105 of the EC Treaty states:

"The primary objective of the ESCB (European System of Central Banks) shall be to maintain price stability. Without prejudice to the objective of price stability, the ESCB shall support the general economic policies of the Community with a view to contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the Community as laid down in Article 2."

EU Agricultural Support

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the EU agricultural support budget is spent in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* France and *(c)* Italy. [2265]

Mr. Rooker: I have been asked to reply.

The Commission's provisional outturn figures for CAP expenditure in 1996 indicate the following percentages:

	Percentages
(a) Germany	15.5
(b) France	24.5
(c) Italy	10.8

HEALTH

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the capital projects being undertaken by NHS trusts under the PFI and their value; and if he will make a statement. [1497]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

This information is presented in the form of two tables. The first table (Table 1) lists all National Health Service trusts with capital projects which have been approved to test for the Private Finance Initiative following the approval of an Outline Business Case (OBC) but have not yet had the final PFI proposal approved in a Full Business Case (FBC).

The second table (Table 2) lists all those NHS trusts which have had their PFI proposal approved in the Full Business Case and are at the stages between FBC approval and completion of the project (the list includes PFI capital projects which have been completed and are fully operational).

Both tables include only PFI projects with a capital value of £1 million or over. Information on projects with a capital value of below £1 million is not held centrally.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 22 May, *Official Report*, column *176*, on the Private Finance Initiative (1) how many merchant banks attended the meetings between the Minister of State and the principal financiers; [1936]

(2) how many merchant banks contacted his Department between 2 May and 20 May, apart from those which took part in the meetings between the Minister of State and the principal financiers; [1934]

(3) if the meetings between the Minister of State and the principal financiers were held at the request of his Department. [1937]

Mr. Milburn: The meeting between the principal financiers involved in the Private Finance Initiative schemes at Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust and Norfolk and Norwich Health Care NHS Trust and me and officials from the Department of Health was held at my request on 15 May. The financiers who attended the meeting were representatives from United Bank of Kuwait, Rabobank, BZW, Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, Innisfree, ABN Amro, and Midland Bank.

Officials from the Department of Health speak on a regular basis to many potential financiers interested in PFI projects.

Portsmouth Hospitals (NHS) Trust

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what was the purpose of his visit to Queen Alexandra Hospital, Portsmouth; who invited him; and when the visit was set up; [2398]

(2) if he will take steps to assist Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust to recover the money from other health trusts which is currently owed for patient care; and if he will conduct an inquiry into the causes of the Trust's deficit; [2400]

(3) what discussions he held on the budgetary problems of Portsmouth Hospitals Trust in the current financial year during the visit on 2 June; and if he will make a statement [2399]

Mr. Milburn: Following an approach by my hon. Friend the member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) in whose constituency Queen Alexandra Hospital is situated, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expressed an interest in visiting the hospital and was warmly welcomed by the Chairman and the Chief Executive of Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust on 2 June. The purpose of the visit was to tour the hospital, inspect its facilities and meet staff and patients. The arrangements were made during the week preceding the visit.

Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust had a very small deficit at the end of the last financial year, but is not currently in deficit. No monies are owed to the trust by other NHS trusts. Discussions during the visit centred around the contracting process, the level of costs incurred by NHS trusts and the internal market.

Methadone

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue new guidance for the prescribing of methadone. [2453]

Ms Jowell: Guidelines on clinical management of drug misuse and dependence were last revised by the Department of Health in 1991, and included information on the appropriate prescription and dispensing of methadone to drug misusers. These guidelines are currently being revised by an expert working group chaired by Professor John Strang, the Chief Medical Officer's consultant adviser on drug misuse. The new guidelines, which will include updated advice on the prescribing of methadone based on the latest research evidence, are expected to be issued to all doctors at the end of 1997.

Children in Care (Homelessness)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in each local authority area are currently in care because of family homelessness. [2397]

Mr. Boateng: The latest figures for the numbers of children looked after because of homelessness, by individual social services department responsible for care, were published in "Children Looked After by Local Authorities, Year Ending 31 March 1995, England" (Table 5). The figures in this publication relate to cases where a child's family was either homeless or evicted or where a child was over sixteen and was homeless or evicted. Copies of the publication are available in the Library.

Weighted Capitation Funding

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the weighted elements of his Department's national weighted capitation formula for health funding; if evidence of population sparsity will be included in that review; and if he will make a statement. [2485]

Mr. Milburn: We will look at how resources are distributed across both secondary and primary care to ensure that these fully reflect local population needs and operate as fairly as possible.

We will continue with the research which has already been commissioned to investigate the possible extra costs associated with the provision of accident and emergency and ambulance services in sparsely populated rural areas. A report is expected in the autumn and the results will be carefully considered.

Ambulance Service (Paramedics)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that there should be a trained paramedic on all accident and emergency ambulances; what targets have been set relating to the provision of paramedics in the ambulance service; and what surveys have been carried out by his Department into the extent of such provision. [2429]

Mr. Boateng: It is the Department's policy that there should be a trained paramedic on every front line ambulance. There are some 6,500 paramedics working for National Health Service ambulance services in England and 32 of the 37 services are able to place a paramedic on every front line ambulance.

Hospital Services (London)

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of the team that will carry out his review of London's hospital services. [2563]

Mr. Milburn: We will be announcing details of the review and its method of operation in due course.

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will direct the Royal Hospitals NHS Trust to halt its plans to close St. Bartholomew's Hospital pending the outcome of his review into London hospitals; [2564]

(2) if he has informed Sir Derek Boorman, chairman of the Royal Hospitals NHS Trust, of his decision to carry out a review of the Trust's decision to close St. Bartholomew's Hospital. [2565.]

Mr. Milburn: We will be announcing details of the review of London's health services in due course. Its effect on individual hospitals will be made clear at that time.

PRIME MINISTER

Windfall Tax (Pharmaceutical Industry)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will impose a windfall tax on the pharmaceutical industry. [1957]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 5 June 1997]:* It would not be appropriate to comment on any possible tax changes during the run up to the Budget.

Cabinet Committees

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish a list of the Ministerial Committees of the Cabinet. [2975]

The Prime Minister: The names and membership of the Ministerial committees which I have established to date are as follows. In addition to the members listed, other Ministers are invited to attend meetings as and when the business requires.

Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy (DOP)

Composition

Prime Minister (Chairman)

Deputy Prime Minister

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

President of the Board of Trade

Secretary of State for Defence

The Chief of Defence Staff attends as required, as do the Chiefs of Staff when necessary. Others are invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of reference

"To keep under review the Government's defence and overseas policy."

Ministerial Committee on Constitutional Reform Policy (CRP)

Composition

Prime Minister (Chairman)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Lord Chancellor

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Scotland

President of the Council

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Lord Privy Seal

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

Minister without Portfolio

Other Ministers may be invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of reference

"To consider strategic issues relating to the Government's constitutional reform policies".

Ministerial Committee on the Intelligence Services (CSI)

Composition

Prime Minister (Chairman)

Deputy Prime Minister

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Defence

Terms of reference

"To keep under review policy on the security and intelligence service."

Ministerial Committee on Northern Ireland (IN)

Composition

Prime Minister (Chairman)

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Defence

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Terms of reference

"To oversee the Government's policy on Northern Ireland issues and relations with the Republic of Ireland on these matters."

Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs (HS)

Composition

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Chairman)

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Lord Chancellor

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

President of the Council

Secretary of State for National Heritage

Secretary of State for Social Security

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Lord Privy Seal

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Minister of Transport

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

Minister without Portfolio

The Attorney General, the Lord Advocate and the Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms also receive papers. They and others are invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of reference

"To consider issues of home and social policy."

Ministerial Committee on the Environment (ENV)

Composition

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Chairman)

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

President of the Council

Secretary of State for National Heritage

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for International Development

Lord Privy Seal

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Minister of Transport

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Departments of the Environments and Transport

Minister without Portfolio

The Secretary of State for Social Security also receives papers. She and other Ministers are invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of reference

"To consider environmental policy issues."

Ministerial Committee on Local Government (GL)

Composition

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Chairman)

Chancellor of the Exchequer

Lord Chancellor

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

President of the Board of Trade

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

President of the Council

Secretary of State for National Heritage

Secretary of State for Social Security

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Lord Privy Seal

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

Minister of Transport

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Departments of the Environment and Transport

Minister without Portfolio

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of reference

"To consider issues affecting local government, including the annual allocation of resources."

Ministerial Committee on Economic Affairs (EA)

Composition

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Chairman)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Secretary of State for the Home Department

President of the Board of Trade and Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

President of the Council

Secretary of State for National Heritage
Secretary of State for Social Security
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Wales
Lord Privy Seal
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Minister of Transport
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Minister without Portfolio

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest. The Chief Scientific Adviser attends for issues relating to science and technology.

Terms of reference

"To consider issues relating to the Government's economic polices."

Ministerial Committee on Public Expenditure (PX)

Composition

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Chairman)
Lord Chancellor
President of the Board of Trade
President of the Council
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Lord Privy Seal
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Minister of State, Department of Social Security

Other Ministers are invited to attend for matters in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of reference

"To review public expenditure allocations and make recommendations to the Cabinet."

Ministerial Committee on The Queen's Speeches and Future Legislation (QFL)

Composition

Lord Chancellor (Chairman)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Lord Privy Seal
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Attorney General
Lord Advocate
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury
Captain of the Gentlemen at Arms
Minister without Portfolio

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is invited to attend for discussions of The Queen's Speeches.

Terms of reference

"To prepare and submit to the Cabinet drafts of The Queen's Speeches to Parliament and proposals for the Government's legislative programme."

Ministerial Committee on Devolution to Scotland and Wales and the English Regions (DSWR)

Composition

Lord Chancellor (Chairman)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Secretary of State for Education and Employment
President of the Board of Trade
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Health
President of the Council
Secretary of State for National Heritage
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Wales
Lord Privy Seal
Chief Secretary, Treasury
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury
Captain of the Gentleman at Arms
Attorney General
Lord Advocate

Other Ministers are invited for items in which they have departmental interest.

Terms of reference

"To consider policy and other issues arising from the Government's policies for devolution to Scotland and Wales and the regions of England and to promote and oversee progress of the relevant legislation through Parliament and its subsequent implementation."

Ministerial Committee on Legislative (LEG)

Composition

President of the Council (Chair)
Lord Chancellor
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Wales
Lord Privy Seal
Attorney General
Lord Advocate
Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury
Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Minister of State, Home Office
Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service
Financial Secretary, Treasury
Captain of the Gentlemen at Arms
Minister without Portfolio

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland also receives papers and is invited to attend as necessary.

Terms of reference

"To examine all draft Bills; to consider the parliamentary handling of Government Bills, European Community documents and Private Members' business, and such other related matters as may be necessary; and to keep under review the Government's policy in relation to issues of Parliamentary procedures."

Ministerial Sub-Committee on European Issues ((E)DOP)

Composition

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Chairman)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Chancellor of the Exchequer
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Secretary of State for Education and Employment
President of the Board of Trade
Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Secretary of State for Scotland
Secretary of State for Defence
President of the Council
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Secretary of State for Wales

Secretary of State for International Development

Lord Privy Seal

Attorney General

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister for Trade and Competitiveness in Europe

Minister without Portfolio

Other Ministers are invited to attend as the nature of the business requires.

The United Kingdom's Permanent Representative to the European Union is also in attendance.

Terms of reference

"To consider questions relating to the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy (DOP)."

Ministerial Sub-Committee on London (GL(L))

Composition

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Chairman)

Paymaster General, Treasury

Minister of State, Department of National Heritage

Minister without Portfolio

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Departments of the Environment and Transport

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Departments of the Environment and Transport

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security

Parliamentary Secretary, Office of Public Service

Terms of reference

"To co-ordinate the Government's policies on London, and report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Local Government (GL) and the Ministerial Committee on Devolution to Scotland, Wales and the English Regions (DSWR)."

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Welfare to Work (EA(WW))

Composition

Chancellor of the Exchequer (Chairman)

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Social Security

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Minister of State, Department of the Environment

Paymaster General, Treasury

Minister of State, Home Office

Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment

Minister of State, Department of Social Security

Minister without Portfolio

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of reference

"To develop policies to get people from welfare to work and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Economic Affairs (EAR)."

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Incorporation of the European Convention of Human Rights (CRP(EC))

Composition

Lord Chancellor (Chairman)

Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Defence

Secretary of State for Health

President of the Council

Secretary of State for Social Security

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Lord Privy Seal

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury

Attorney General

Lord Advocate

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of reference

"To consider policy and other issues arising from the Government's decision to legislate for the incorporation of ECHR in UK law and to promote and oversee progress of the relevant legislation through Parliament and its subsequent implementation, reporting as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Constitutional Reform Policy."

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Drug Misuse (HS(D))

Composition

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Chair)

Secretary of State for International Development

Solicitor General

Financial Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Minister of State, Ministry of Defence

Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment and Transport also receives papers and may be invited to attend as appropriate.

Terms of reference

"To co-ordinate the Government's national and international policies for tackling drugs misuse, and report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs (HS))."

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Health Strategy (HS(H)

Composition

President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Chair)

Secretary of State for Health

Secretary of State for International Development

Minister of State, Departments of the Environment and Transport

Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Minister of State, Department of Health

Economic Secretary, Treasury

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Departments of the Environment and Transport

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

The Chief Medical Officer is in attendance.

Other Ministers are invited to attend for items in which they have a departmental interest.

Terms of reference

"To oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of the Government's health strategy; to co-ordinate the Government's policies on United Kingdom-wide issues affecting health; and to report as necessary to the Ministerial committee on Home and Social Affairs (HS)."

Ministerial Sub-Committee on Women's Issues (HS(W))

Composition

Secretary of State for Social Security (Chair)

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for International Development

Financial Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Home Office

Minister of State, Scottish Office

Minister of State, Department of Health

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Departments of the Environment and Transport

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Departments of the Environment and Transport

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Education and Employment

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Social Security

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Welsh Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Office of Public Service

Terms of reference

"To review and develop the Government's policy and strategy on issues of special concern to women; to oversee their implementation; and to report as necessary to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs (HS)."

Ministerial Group on Food Safety (MISC 1)

Composition

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Chairman)

Secretary of State for Education and Employment

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Secretary of State for Scotland

Secretary of State for Health

President of the Council

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

Secretary of State for Wales

Chief Secretary, Treasury

Minister of State, Departments of Environment and Transport

Minister of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Minster without Portfolio

The Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury will also receive papers and may attend as necessary.

Terms of reference

"To co-ordinate Departmental consideration of issues arising from the establishment of a Food Standards Agency and other aspects of food safety, and to make recommendations to the Ministerial Committee on Home and Social Affairs".

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by her Department, and what information presented to her, regarding the costs per annum to the DTI budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if she will make a statement. [2109]

Mrs. Beckett: We will ask the independent Low Pay Commission, before it reaches a recommendation on the level at which the national minimum wage might be set, to take into account all the economic circumstances, including its likely impact. I will not speculate about the possible effects of hypothetical levels before the Commission has had a chance to consider the issues.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage by what means his Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1665]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Department produces both Braille and large print copies of publications where a demand has been identified or where there is an obligation to inform people of their rights and entitlements.

The Department is currently reviewing its policy on the production of accessible formats to agree a set of objective criteria for judging demand and to help develop cost-effective ways of providing information.

Tourism

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what evidence he has of the effect on the balance of payments in tourism of changes in the real exchange rate measured in terms of export unit values; what were imports and exports of tourism in cash terms and as a percentage of gross overseas products for each year since 1983, together with the balance of payments in tourism; what estimate he has made of the extent to which the figures are affected by changes in the real exchange rate since 1994 as measured by changes in the nominal exchange rate and in the real exchange rate weighted by the percentage change in import and export unit values in

trade on manufactures with non-EC countries; and what is his estimate of the increase in output in the United Kingdom tourist industry in 1997 and 1998. [2127]

Mr. Tom Clarke: The level of inbound and domestic tourism in the UK is affected by a number of factors such as the quality and range of hotels (and other facilities) and the marketing of attractions, as well as the relative cost of the holidays in the UK and elsewhere. The Government are aware that the sterling exchange rate can affect the level of inbound and outbound tourism but do not make forecasts of the specific effects. The figures requested are shown in the following table:

	Exports of goods and services			*Imports of goods and services*			
	Tourism credits (£ million)	*Total export credits (£ million)*	*Tourism as a percentage of all exports*	*Tourism debits (£ million)*	*Total debits (£ million)*	*Tourism as a percentage of all imports*	*Balance of payments in tourism (£ million)*
1983	4,003	79,880	5.0	4,090	77,588	5.3	–87
1984	4,614	91,632	5.0	4,663	92,763	5.0	–49
1985	5,442	102,041	5.3	4,871	98,988	4.9	571
1986	5,553	97,885	5.7	6,083	101,221	6.0	–530
1987	6,260	106,397	5.9	7,280	111,737	6.5	–1,020
1988	6,184	107,273	5.8	8,216	124,796	6.6	–2,032
1989	6,945	121,486	5.7	9,357	142,808	6.6	–2,412
1990	7,748	133,165	5.8	9,886	148,285	6.7	–2,138
1991	7,386	134,289	5.5	9,951	141,009	7.1	–2,565
1992	7,891	142,114	5.6	11,243	150,268	7.5	–3,352
1993	9,487	159,997	5.9	12,972	167,941	7.7	–3,485
1994	9,919	176,065	5.6	14,500	182,149	8.0	–4,581
1995	12,092	197,600	6.1	15,683	203,086	7.7	–3,591
1996[1]	12,693	215,195	5.9	16,607	220,792	7.5	–3,914

[1] Provisional.

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what assessment has been made of the effect of the sale of British Rail International Ltd. on United Kingdom tourism. [2007]

Mr. Clarke: None. The sale of British Rail International Ltd. (BRIL) to Grandes Lignes International SA, a wholly owned subsidiary of Societe National des Chemins de fer Francais, (SNCF), the French state-owned railway was only completed on 24 March 1997 after competitive tender.

National Lottery

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to allow purchasers of lottery tickets to determine which causes are supported as a consequence of that purchase; and if he will make a statement. [1955]

Mr. Banks *[holding answer 5 June 1997]:* The national lottery is the people's money and its proceeds should go to projects which the people support. To that end, the Government plan to establish a £1 billion fund for health education and other initiatives and to review the way lottery funds are distributed to the existing good causes. We will be publishing a White Paper setting out our proposals next month.

Television Licences (Pensioners)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) what estimate he has made of the cost of making television licences available to pensioners at a discount of *(a)* 75 per cent. *(b)* 50 per cent. and *(c)* 25 per cent. of the normal fee for colour and black and white sets; and if he will make a statement; [2169]

(2) what representations he has received from pensioner groups requesting him to exempt pensioners from having to buy a television licence; and if he will make a statement; [2170]

(3) what would be the annual cost of exempting all pensioners from having to buy a television licence; and if he will make a statement. [2281]

Mr. Fisher: The estimated annual cost, in lost licence fee revenue, of providing concessionary television licences for all pensioners would be:

	£ million
For a 25 per cent. discount	157
For a 50 per cent. discount	314
For a 75 per cent. discount	471
For free licences	628

Department of National Heritage records do not distinguish between representations from pensioner groups and those from other organisations or individuals, nor between those calling for free television licences for pensioners and those seeking a lesser concession. Since the Election, the Government have received 56 representations about television licence fees for pensioners and the concessionary television licence scheme, 25 of them from hon. Members. We have no plans to amend the concessionary television licence scheme.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

Environmental Protection and Sustainability

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the initiatives taken by the Government since 1 May in respect of environmental protection and sustainability. [2084]

Angela Eagle: We will fulfil our Manifesto commitment to put the environment at the heart of decision-making across Government and we are considering the mechanisms which will deliver this. The framework for this was outlined in the speech my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister gave on 5 June at UNED-UK. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will reinforce our international commitments when he addresses the special session of the United Nations General Assembly at its conference on sustainable development at the end of this month. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary stressed the importance of the environment in his mission statement. The Department for International Development has announced a commitment to promoting sustainable development through its activities.

In these first few weeks in Government it is right that we should build our policies carefully and coherently as well as imaginatively, and take time to consult widely about our future programme. But already we have begun to take steps to improve our environment. The appointment of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister as Secretary of State for the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, demonstrates our commitment to tackle environmental issues and sustainability in a more integrated way. We are setting up machinery to enable Departments to adopt a consistent approach to assessing the environmental consequences of policies. We are about to embark on discussions with the House authorities on a powerful new parliamentary environmental audit committee to scrutinise the sustainable development implications of policies and action across Government as promised in our Manifesto.

Already some significant action has been taken in specific fields. At our summit on water resources and supply last month we set out a 10 point plan to help secure reliable, efficient and environmentally sustainable water supplies. This includes setting new mandatory leakage targets, doing more to help customers conserve water and reviews of the charging and abstraction systems. We have launched a fundamental transport policy review to deliver an integrated transport policy. We have set in hand work to analayse what carbon savings the main policy areas could contribute towards our Manifesto target of reducing CO_2 emissions by 20 per cent. by 2010. This is the beginning of our action to promote environmental protection and sustainability, delivered in just a few weeks. Much more is to follow.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for legislation to strengthen the protection given to sites of special scientific interest. [2081]

Angela Eagle: The Government are currently considering the options for strengthening the protection of wildlife and sites of special scientific interest.

Green Ministers

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many meetings of Green Ministers have taken place since 1 May; and what plans there are for further meetings. [2085]

Angela Eagle: In fulfilling our commitment to put the environment at the heart of Government we are currently reviewing all the existing and potential machinery for effective delivery of our goal, including the network of Green Ministers that was established by the previous Administration. Final decisions have not yet been taken but one of the outputs of that review will be to ensure that every Department plays its full part and that Ministers in every Department are fully involved in the process.

Inquiry (Merry Hill)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will be in a position to decide on the inspector's recommendations relating to Merry Hill. [2162]

Mr. Raynsford: A decision will be issued shortly.

Mine Planning Applications

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning applications for new drift or deep mines have been submitted in England, Scotland and Wales in each of the past five years; which companies have submitted the applications; and what are the localities to which the applications relate. [2028]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* The number of planning applications for new deep mines in England in each of the past five years are as shown in the table. It is not possible to separate applications for deep and drift mines. Information concerning the companies who submitted the applications is not held centrally. The information relating to Scotland and Wales are matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales.

Location	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Derbyshire	1	0	0	0	0
Warwickshire	0	0	1	0	0
Durham	0	0	1	0	0
North Yorkshire	0	0	1	0	0
Humberside	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	1	0	3	0	1

Council Tax

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he has received from council tax payers in Somerset complaining about the level of the council tax levied by Somerset county council for 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [2201]

Mr. Raynsford *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* None.

Planning Application (South Yorkshire)

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish his decision on whether to allow Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council to determine the planning application for a site at Catcliffe, South Yorkshire, to be called Waverley Leisure Park; and if he will make a statement. [2303]

Mr. Raynsford: I have discussed this case with ministerial colleagues; and, as a result of these discussions, we shall be seeking from the local planning authority further information. When we have this information, we will be able to decide whether the application should be called in or left to the authority to determine.

TRANSPORT

Cones Hotline

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the total cost of the cones hotline; how many calls were received; how many raised issues that resulted in remedial actions; and what was the cost of each of these calls as a percentage of the total costs. [1932]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The cones hotline operated from June 1992 until September 1995 when it was replaced by the Highways Agency information line. The cost of establishing and running the cones hotline prior to March 1994 is not available as, until then, calls were routed through the Department of Transport's general inquiry number. In the Financial year 1994–95, the cost of the dedicated service line was approximately £5,000. Staffing costs were met from within existing establishment and budgets. In the period April to September 1995 the cost of running the cones hotline is estimated at £20,000, including staff and call charges. The total number of calls received between June 1992 and September 1995 was 19,500. Approximately half the calls concerned traffic management (although only a small proportion were about traffic cones), and half were requests for information about road works or general queries about roads, planning policy and so on. Where appropriate, the Department took steps to alter the layout of road traffic cones, improve signposting at roadworks, review diversion routes, re-paint road markings and investigate road lighting at roadworks as a result of comments and complaints from hotline callers. The cost of each of these calls as a percentage of the total costs is not available.

Rail Services

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he requires the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising to notify him of any instances where permission is given to train operators not to run services set out in the Passenger Services Requirement; and if he has been notified by OPRAF that such permission to withdraw services has been given to GNER in respect of the east coast main line franchise. [2428]

Ms Glenda Jackson: No. The Franchising Director is responsible for ensuring compliance with franchise agreements, including the conditions of Passenger Service Requirements. I understand that, in the case of GNER, no permission has been given to withdraw services specified in the PSR. I understand that the hon. Gentleman has written to the Franchising Director who will no doubt provide him with a full explanation of the position.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will issue guidelines for the improvement of rail services on Sundays. [2455]

Ms Jackson: The Government want to see improvements to rail services generally, and is particularly keen to see enhancements made to off peak services including Sunday services. The Franchising Director is currently developing Criteria for the Appraisal of Support for Passenger Rail Services which will be used to assess, among other things, proposals for new subsidised services. The criteria will assist those bringing forward initiatives to enhance services. A number of franchisees—for example, Connex Rail and M40 Trains—have introduced new Sunday services as they committed to do in their franchise plans.

Felixstowe-Liverpool-Holyhead Rail Link

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is Government Policy concerning up-grading the Felixstowe-Liverpool-Holyhead rail link. [2178]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand that Railtrack, in consultation with Freightliner, is considering options for investment which would permit greater utilisation of the cross-country route between Felixstowe and the west coast main line, primarily for the transport of container freight traffic.

The Government have made it clear that they expect higher levels of investment in the railway network and is considering whether the current regulatory regime is strong enough to secure that.

Emergency Towing Vessels (Falmouth)

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for the long term for emergency towing vessels in Falmouth. [2176]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Coastguard Agency to carry out an assessment of the trials of Emergency Towing Vessels over the last three winters. These results are expected by the end of July 1997. Meanwhile, the Coastguard Agency has extended the present contracts for all three Emergency Towing Vessels to provide cover during the coming winter in the Dover Strait, North West Scotland and the Western Approaches from October 1997 to March 1998.

Bicycle Bells

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the present regulations regarding bicycle bells; what representations he has received on the subject; and if he will make a statement. [2288]

Ms Glenda Jackson: At present there are no requirements for bells on bicycles.

As part of a public consultation exercise on proposals to update the Pedal Bicycles (Safety) Regulations, general views were requested on the fitment of bells on pedal cycles. Strong support was shown for the mandatory fitment of bells on pedal cycles at the point of sale, and as stated in a reply to a question in another place—*Official Report*, House of Lords, 21 May 1997 column 1—we are looking at the issues as a matter of priority.

Eurostar Services

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his estimate of the start dates for Eurostar services north of London. [2177]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I understand form Eurostar (UK) Ltd. that it plans to start running regional Eurostar services later this year.

Rail Improvements

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on plans for improvements to railway signalling and tracks; and what plans he has to meet officials of Railtrack to discuss these issues. [2454]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Plans for improvements to track and signalling are a matter for Railtrack. We have made it clear that we expect higher levels of investment in the network and are considering whether the current regulatory regime is strong enough to secure that. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has met the chairman of Railtrack to discuss a range of issues.

Public Transport

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he plans to take to promote leisure travel by public transport. [2456]

Ms Glenda Jackson: On 5 June my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions announced a fundamental review of transport policy—*Official Report*, column *226*. The review will include measures to reduce car dependency and promote the use of public transport for all types of journey.

Light Rail Schemes

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase the funds available within his budget for the promotion of light rail schemes. [2405]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Bids for funding light rail systems will be considered, on their merits, as part of the allocation of resources for funding transport capital expenditure by local authorities.

But, as my right hon. Friend The Deputy Prime Minister said recently, there needs to be a co-ordinated approach to transport infrastructure. Light rail will not work in isolation but needs to be part of an integrated package of measures to achieve our overall objectives including the reduction of car dependency.

Railtrack

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last held meetings with representatives of Railtrack plc; and if he will make a statement. [2697]

Ms Glenda Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister met the chairman of Railtrack on 21 May. The Government have made it clear that we expect higher levels of investment in the network. We are considering whether the current regulatory regime is strong enough to secure that.

Rail Ticket Sales

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the Rail Regulator to complete his report into impartial ticket sales; and whether this report will be published. [2661]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Rail Regulator is still considering how and when to publish the results of his "mystery shopping" surveys on rail ticket outlets.

Road Contracts

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has imposed a moratorium on the letting of new road contracts. [2298]

Ms Glenda Jackson *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* No, but no new starts on national schemes are planned for this financial year. We are committed to a review of the roads programme, the details and scope of which will be announced shortly.

Bristol Channel

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he will take to improve the monitoring and regulation of shipping movements in the Bristol channel. [2638]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The marine Safety Agency will continue to keep under review the need for additional routeing measures around the United Kingdom coast through its programme of maritime traffic surveys. however, the Bristol channel was not an area of concern in Lord Donaldson's report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas" and there are no immediate plans for a traffic survey.

A comprehensive database—the COAST Ship Traffic Database—indicates an average of 22 merchant shipping movements daily through the Bristol channel comprising four tankers, 17 other cargo ships and one ferry. This is a low density compared to the 440 daily shipping movements in the busy Dover strait.

Ships in the Bristol channel, as elsewhere, must navigate in accordance with the detailed Rules of the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Constitutional Bills

Mr. Howard: To ask the President of the Council on which previous occasion or occasions a Bill of constitutional significance has been made subject to a timetable motion before the commencement of the Committee stage. [2153]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The Scotland Bill and the Wales Bill were the subject of allocation of time orders made on 16 November 1997, having been given a Second Reading on 14 and 15 November respectively.

Parliamentary Privilege

Ms Southworth: To ask the President of the Council what plans she has to establish a review of parliamentary privilege. [3046]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: The Government believe that, in the context of their initiative to modernize Parliament, the time is now ripe for a general review of parliamentary privilege. Various aspects of the relationship between Parliament and the courts have given rise to difficulties in recent years, and the boundaries between them have been redrawn without any fundamental reappraisal of the kind of legal immunities which Parliament and its Members ought to enjoy at the end of the twentieth century.

The need for a review has become more pressing with today's announcement by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary of proposals for taking forward a general reform of the corruption statutes, which will include clarifying the law relating to bribery of Members of Parliament, as recommended by the Nolan Committee. The implications for parliamentary privilege, which would clearly be considerable, would need to be considered carefully in advance of the introduction of legislation.

Since this is a matter for Parliament and one which affects both Houses the Government believes that such a review could be undertaken most appropriately by a Joint Committee. Consultations are taking place about setting up the committee and about the terms of reference it might have.

The Government hope that it might be possible to complete this review by early next year.

SCOTLAND

Child Labour

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to ensure the enforcement of existing legislation to outlaw the illegal employment of school age children. [1540]

Mr. Wilson: We are considering how the existing system for protecting children who work might be improved.

Political and Special Advisors

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2423]

Mr. Dewar *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* My Department employs 2 Special Advisers, Miss Wendy Alexander and Mr. Murray Elder. Immediately prior to appointment Miss Alexander was employed as a Senior Associate with Booz, Allen and Hamilton, International (UK) Ltd. and Mr. Elder already worked with me in an advisory capacity.

The terms and conditions of each appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special Advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

These are personal appointments made by me following consultation with the Permanent Head of my Department and the Prime Minister.

Scottish Screen

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total annual budget for Scottish Screen; and if he will provide a breakdown of the categories within that budget and the money allocated to each category. [2192]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* The cash limit for Scottish Screen in 1997–98 is £1,975,000. Scottish Screen forecasts that it will receive additional income of £711,000 making a total budget of £2.7 million. Budgets for the 8 departments have been prepared for Board approval.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the names and designations of the persons within Scottish Screen with authority to make expenditure commitments on its behalf. [2193]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* The expenditure of Scottish Screen is the responsibility of the Chief Executive, Mr. John Archer. He delegates as appropriate to the heads of the departments of Scottish Screen.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many meetings have been held by the Board of Scottish Screen since it inception. [2194]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* One: the first meeting of the Board of Scottish Screen was held on 5 June.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how may times per year the Board of Scottish Screen is expected to meet; and how many times it is scheduled to meet in 1997. [2195]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* The Board of Scottish Screen will decide how frequently it will meet. Three further meetings are planned for 1997.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were *(a)* the total number of people and *(b)* the names of the people sent to the Cannes Film Festival at the expense of Scottish Screen; and what was the expenditure incurred by Scottish Screen in respect of representation at that festival. [2197]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Nine persons attended. Mr. John Archer, Ms Celia Stevenson, Mr. Eddie Dick, Ms Catherine Aitken, Mr. Oscar Van Heek, Ms Lesley Anderson, Ms Judy Anderson, Ms Emma Valentine and Ms Maxine Baker. The total includes four who were committed to attend the Festival by the organisation which employed them before April 1997. The expenditure incurred, including the launch of Scottish Screen at the Scottish film day, was approximately £20,000.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions took place between the Government and the Opposition with regard to the appointment of the chairman of Scottish Screen. [2199]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* No consultation took place between the previous Administration and the then Opposition about this appointment.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide a breakdown of the expenditure commitments made by Scottish Screen since its inception, listing the categories within the overall budget from which those commitments have been made. [2200]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Scottish Screen has made the following commitments since its inception:

	£
Grant to the Edinburgh Film Festival (this is in addition to £366,000 inherited commitments for Regional Film Theatres and Festivals	58,500
Cataloguing the Archive (contingent on a Lottery fund application)	41,200
Training awards	14,100
Moonstone International	17,500
Film Development Awards	16,250
Total	147,550

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current status of the Scottish Arts Council inquiry into the productions assisted by the Scottish Film Production Fund, with which the chairman of Scottish Screen was associated. [2209]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* The Scottish Arts Council is satisfied that all Lottery film awards have met the requirements of public accountability.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangement the Scottish Office has put in place *(a)* to monitor the performance of Scottish Screen and *(b)* to make publicly available reports on the performance of Scottish Screen. [2208]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* The performance of Scottish Screen will be measured against the objectives set in its Corporate Plan which will be approved by Ministers each year. Scottish Screen's Annual Reports will reflect the extent to which the objectives set have been achieved.

Registers of Scotland

Mr. Eric Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to reconstitute the Registers of Scotland Customer Advisory Group. [2877]

Mr. McLeish: My right hon. Friend has decided that the Customer Advisory Group is not the best way of meeting the need for a forum in which customers can seek to influence the Agency's activities, or for a body to provide independent advice on the Agency's strategic direction and has decided to discontinue it. Registers of Scotland now has a variety of ways of ensuring that customers of the Agency are fully consulted about its services and can seek to influence its activities. As regards a body to advise on the Agency's overall direction, my right hon. Friend proposes to set up a Registers of Scotland Strategic Advisory Group (ROSSAG) with the following remit:

"to advise the Secretary of State on the Agency's:

strategic and corporate planning;

its Annual Report and Accounts;

its major business developments.

and to provide advice to the Keeper on his forward planning".

The chairman and the membership will be representative of the following bodies and will be announced in due course.

The law Society of Scotland

The Scottish Consumer Council

Scottish Homes

The Council of Mortgage Lenders

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

I am arranging for a copy of a revision to the Agency Framework Document reflecting this change to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Opencast Development

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what communications he has received from the Harthill Armadale Blackridge Against Opencast in relation to proposed development near the M8 motorway; and what response he has sent. [1971]

Mr. Chisholm: My right hon. Friend has received two letters form Harthill Armadale Blackridge Against Opencast expressing concern about proposals for opencast coal mining near Harthill. Both correspondents received replies from The Scottish Office indicating that, if North Lanarkshire Council were minded to grant planning permission for the proposed development, the planning application would require to be notified to my right hon. Friend in order that he might decide whether or not he would determine the issue.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has in respect of the legal costs incurred by local authorities that reject planning applications by those who wish to develop opencast sites. [1972]

Mr. Chisholm: It is for local authorities out of the resources available to them to make provision for any legal costs that may be incurred in the exercise of their statutory planning responsibilities. There are no proposals to make an exception to this long established practice in relation to opencast developments.

Structural Funds

Mrs. Ewing: to ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has made to the European Commission in relation to the review of Objective 1 and Objective 5b structural funds. [2558]

Mr. Chisholm: In relation to the interim period re-assessments of the current 6 year Objective 1 and 5b programmes, the consultants' reports on the Scottish areas have all been received. They are being discussed by the Partnerships, who will produce any initial proposals for

review of the programmes. I expect to put forward proposals to the European Commission late this Summer or in early Autumn.

The Government has not put forward detailed submissions to the Commission at this early stage of the Reform of the Structural Funds. We expect to put forward some proposals after the completion of the Inter-Governmental Conference.

Partnership Areas

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will extend the time scale for submissions on the programme for partnership area monitoring and evaluation guidance notes issued by the Scottish Office; and if he will make a statement. [2682]

Mr. Chisholm: I have no plans to do so. It is important for partnerships to put in place effective monitoring and evaluation systems as soon as possible, and they have accordingly been asked to submit monitoring and evaluation plans, together with annual reports, by the end of this month.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Urban Disturbances

20. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to meet the Association of Chief Police Officers to discuss youth-led urban disturbances. [934]

Mr. Michael: Both my right hon. Friend and myself have met the Association of Chief Police Officers since taking office and have discussed offending by young people with several chief officers. My right hon. Friend has made plans to discuss youth-led urban disturbances with ACPO in the near future.

Asylum and Immigration Act

21. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce changes to the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. [936]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are reviewing the Act's provisions and will consider the options for change that best meet our Manifesto commitments.

Violent Crime

22. **Mr. Stephen Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the OECD countries in which there has been a rise in violent crime equivalent to that in England and Wales in the last 10 years. [937]

Mr. Michael: The latest information available shows that over the period 1987–95 the number of violent crimes recorded by the police rose by 60 per cent. in England and Wales, of the 13 OECD countries for which information is available only France (71 per cent.) and New Zealand (80 per cent.) had a higher percentage increase while the lowest increase was Italy at 4 per cent.

European Convention on Human Rights

23. **Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law. [935]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We will introduce a Bill for this purpose in this Session of Parliament.

Drink-related Crime

24. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to deal with drink-related crime. [938]

Mr. Michael: We plan to take early action to tackle drink-related crime including placing a new duty on local authorities and the police together to develop local community safety programmes. Our plans include introducing a tougher licensing regime, encouraging firmer measures to deal with offenders and promoting greater use of programmes aimed at preventing alcohol-related crime.

Youth Crime

25. **Mr. Bernard Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he intends to take to prevent children turning to crime; and if he will make a statement. [939]

Mr. Michael: We are pursuing a wide ranging programme of activities to reform and speed up the youth justice system and to prevent youth crime. We will introduce child protection orders to ensure that young children are not left to roam the streets unsupervised at nights, and a new parental responsibility order to ensure that parents face up to their responsibility for their children's misbehaviour and are given the help they need to deal with it.

Asylum Applications

26. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to reduce the current backlog of asylum applications awaiting determination. [940]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As we said in our Manifesto, the system for dealing with asylum seekers is expensive and too slow.

We are critically evaluating all aspects of asylum law and procedures. This includes the 1996 Act. Reducing the backlog of cases which we inherited is an important element of that process.

The taxpayer and the asylum seeker are entitled to decisions which are swift and fair.

Prisons (Illegal Drugs)

27. **Ms Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to restrict the availability of illegal drugs in prisons. [941]

Mr. George Howarth: The Prison Service is taking a number of measures to reduce the availability of illegal drugs in prisons. These include the use in many establishments of non-contact or closed visits for prisoners known or reasonably suspected to have used

drugs, improved liaison with local police forces over the charging of visitors who attempt to smuggle drugs, and the increased use of closed circuit television in visit areas. In addition some 70 establishments have dogs trained in detecting drugs, while others have arrangements for the regular loan of such dogs.

Police Constables

28. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of police constables in England and Wales. [942]

Mr. Michael: It is for individual chief constables and police authorities to determine the number of constables in each force, having regard to the resources available to them. The Government will relieve the police of unnecessary bureaucratic burdens to allow chief constables to put more officers back on the beat.

Prison Service

29. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the management of the Prison Service. [943]

Ms Joyce Quin: We pledged in our Manifesto to take proper Ministerial responsibility for the Prison Service.

There are no plans to end the status of the Prison Service as an executive agency within the Home Office. But I intend to examine the structure and organisation of the Prison Service and the Home Office's policy role, taking account of the Director General's organisational review which is already under way.

Arrested Persons (Heroin Addicts)

30. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the proportion of heroin addicts among all those who are arrested. [944]

Mr. George Howarth: It is difficult to quantify the proportion of offenders addicted to drugs or dependent on them. The Home Office has a research programme designed to shed further light on the links between drugs and crime. It includes a study of drug use by samples of people arrested by the police in various cities. Preliminary results from this study point to a higher level of drug taking by arrestees than expected. However, the study is still incomplete; the university of Cambridge will be delivering a report to the Home Office in October, which is likely to be published around the end of the year.

Police Authorities (Funding)

31. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the method by which money is allocated to police authorities. [945]

Mr. Michael: I intend to give careful consideration to the funding formula by which resources are allocated between police authorities, to consider what modifications might be made both for the short and the longer term.

Young Offenders

32. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his Department's plans to shorten the period between arrest and sentencing for young offenders. [946]

Mr. Michael: We are taking immediate action to speed up proceedings against young offenders. The Crime and Disorder Bill will include reforms to the youth justice system and we aim to halve the average time between arrest and sentencing for young offenders.

Crime Victims (Rights)

33. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to strengthen the rights of victims of crime; and if he will make a statement. [947]

Mr. Michael: We are committed to helping victims of crime and to taking action to redress the balance of the criminal justice system in favour of the victim. We will ensure that all the criminal justice agencies give a high priority to treating victims with sensitivity and respect, listening to their views and improving the services they provide to victims. We will ensure that victims of crime are informed of progress in their case—if they want to be—and that, following our reorganisation of the Crown Prosecution Service, local Crown Prosecutors become more involved in informing victims of their decisions.

We are also committed to providing greater protection for victims in rape and serious sexual offence trials and for those subject to intimidation, including witnesses. We shall be bringing forward detailed proposals on this in due course. Victims will also benefit from our proposals to tackle violence in our society and for speeding up justice.

Alcopops

34. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider the banning of alcopops. [948]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government have make clear their concerns about underage drinking. A Ministerial Group on Alcopops has been set up and had its first meeting on 22 May. We are looking to the industry to take urgent action. If there is no satisfactory response, we shall be considering a range of options for Government action, up to and including a complete ban.

37. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reduce the consumption of alcopop-type drinks by those under 18 years. [951]

Mr. Howarth: The Government have made clear its concern about underage drinking. A Ministerial Group on Alcopops has been set up and had its first meeting on 22 May. We are looking to the industry to take urgent action. If there is no satisfactory response, we shall be considering a range of options for Government action.

Serious Criminal Offences

36. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of people convicted for the first time of a serious criminal offence since 1 May. [950]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is not available.

The latest figures available are for 1994 and it is estimated that some 2,300 persons were convicted for the first time of a "standard list" offence each week.

Such offences, which include all indictable and some of the more serious summary offences, are listed in appendices 4 and 5 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1995".

Minimum Mandatory Sentences

35. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has in respect of minimum mandatory sentences for career burglars and dealers in hard drugs. [949]

Mr. Michael: We believe tough punishments are appropriate for career burglars and dealers in hard drugs.

Crime

38. **Ms McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reports he has received regarding comparisons between the incidence of crime in England and Wales and that in other countries. [952]

Mr. Michael: I have recently received a draft report on key findings of the 1996 International Crime Victimisation Survey which shows that England and Wales are top of the international league for levels of burglary, car crime and violent crime. The full report of the survey is expected in July and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Human Rights

39. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve the United Kingdom's record on human rights. [953]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We will incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law. This will allow people to enforce their human rights in British courts, and will promote a greater awareness of human rights issues in society as a whole.

Probation Service

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the resources available to the probation service. [928]

Ms Joyce Quin: We are reviewing a number of aspects of Home Office funding, including that of the probation service. We have not reached a considered view about the appropriate level of central Government provision.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to incorporate the European convention on Human Rights into domestic law. [1062]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As announced in the Gracious Speech, we will introduce a Bill for this purpose in this Session of Parliament. This will keep the commitment made in the Labour Manifesto.

Firearms Compensation Scheme

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the differences between the draft Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 compensation scheme laid before the House on 3 June and the scheme laid on 22 May. [2491]

Mr. Michael: With two minor exceptions in the main body of the draft scheme, the changes correct factual errors in the items and values listed in the annexes. Changes have been made as a result of comments received from the industry. A few listings were wrongly included and do not relate to items covered by the 1997 Act. In other cases more general generic descriptions have been given, replacing specific brand names. These changes improve the draft scheme, incorporating some information received after the initial version of the scheme was laid.

Referring to the numbering of the latest version of the draft Scheme the alternations are as follows:

Main text

Paragraph 1

The sentence now ends more specifically with the words "..... the date on which section 1 comes into force."

Paragraph 17

The FCS is defined as the "Home Office Firearms Compensation Section." Previously there was no specific definition.

Annex A

Page x

New sub-heading "Miscellaneous."

Value of item 1149 (Lar Griffly) is reduced from £710 to £695.

Page xi

New sub-heading "Pardini."

Page xii

New sub-heading "Safari Enforcer."

Annex C

Page i

Preamble originally at top of page moved to footnotes on page ii and expanded for additional clarity.

Value of item 3005 (Primers) reduced from £10 to £1. This was an error in the original version where the value per 1000 was given as the value per 100.

Page ii

Value of item 3009 increased from £40 to £100.

Value of item 3017 reduced from £10 to £5.

Value of item 3018 increased from £25 to £30. Wording allowing any other item not specifically listed now deleted.

Annex D

Page iii

Value of items 4042 (Safariland 009 Ultimato Option 1911 Holster) reduced from £125 to £110.

Page v

Former item 4078 (Ruger Mini 14 Series Weaver Mount—181, 182, 183, 48602) deleted. These are rifle mounts.

Page vi

Former items 4098–4101 (B-Square Pistol Mounts) deleted. These are also rifle mounts.

Page xi

Sub-heading amended to "Weaver Qwik Point Red Dot Sights."

Page xii

Former items 4205–4217, which mistakenly related to rifles, deleted.

Page xiv

Former items 4269–4277, which mistakenly related to rifles, deleted.

Page xv

Former items 4288–4315, which mistakenly related to rifles, deleted.

Page xvii

New sub-heading "Generic Magazines."

Page xx

Former items 4440–4441 (Ruger Magazines), which both mistakenly related to rifles, deleted.

Page xxi

Former items 4499–4512 (Walther Magazines) renumbered as items 4405–4418.

New sub-heading "CZ Magazines."

Page xxiv

Item 4544 (Clays Belt), which mistakenly related to shotguns, deleted.

Page xxvii

New sub-heading "Davis Handgrip" and former item 4589 (Hogue Wood Pistol Grips Davis S and W K/L Large Grip renumbered and renamed 4530 Davis Handgrip: S&W K/L Large Grip. No change in value.

Former items 4590, 4593, 4594 (Pachmayr Grips) deleted. These were repeating other entries which would have caused confusion.

Page xxx

Former items 4646–4678 (Pistol Bullet Moulds) are deleted and replaced by a single generic description under item 4583.

Former items 4679–4719 (Hodgdon and Miscellaneous Pistol Dies) are deleted and replaced by four generic descriptions under items 4584–4587.

Former item 4720 (Lee Precision Pistol Press) deleted and replaced by item 4588 (Dillon Square Deal Pistol Press). No change in value.

Former items 4722, 4724, 4725 (ammunition) deleted. These were repeating other items of ammunition of the same type and value and were removed to avoid confusion.

Value of item 4589 (9mm Luger/Para 115 FMJ ammunition) reduced from £1.50 to £1.40 and item 4590 (Para 125 FMJ ammunition) reduced from £3.20 to £1.60.

Name of item 4592 changed from ".32 S&W Long" to ".32 S&W."

Page xxxi

Minor amendments made to names of items 4604 (letters "FMJ" deleted) 4605 ("SWC" deleted) and 4606 ("FMJ" deleted). No changes in values.

Pages xxxiv and xxxv

Values of items 4809–4819 (primers) reduced by an average factor of ten. The original values were wrongly shown as per 1000.

Pages xxxvi and xxxvii

New sub-heading "Fire Dragon Gun Parts" and "Wilson Custom Parts" and some consequent rearrangement of the listing on these two pages.

Former item 4871 (Tanfoglio P9, 6" Barrel) deleted.

Value of item 4865 (Wilson Custom Parts: Para-Ordnance P12 Barrel) (formerly item 4866) increased from £160 to £165 and 4866 (Wilson Custom Parts: Para-Ordnance P13 Barrel) (formerly item 4867) increased from £160 to £165. Items 4867–4869 (Wilson Custom Parts) are new entries.

Page xxxix–xii

New items 4892–4916 (Thompson Barrels–Blue).

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the future of section 11 funding in the next financial year; and if he will make a statement. [2680]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Existing funding is committed to projects which are due to run until August 1998. We will announce our intentions for the period after that as soon as we can.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the amount of section 11 funding awarded to each LEA, and in total, for *(a)* 1994–95, *(b)* 1995–96 and *(c)* 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [2681]

Mr. O'Brien: The amounts of grant paid to, or expected to be paid to local education authorities in relation to their expenditure within each of these years are as follows:

Section 11 Grant: LEA funding for 1994–95 to 1996–97

LEA	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Avon[1]	596,858	527,013	0
Barking and Dagenham	230,860	258,362	265,283
Barnet	704,622	739,744	785,198
Bedfordshire	2,223,694	1,988,238	2,042,915
Berkshire	1,012,585	818,675	839,709
Bexley	100,138	100,848	113,896
Birmingham	3,697,999	3,324,125	3,415,538
Bolton	713,642	578,376	594,282
Bradford	3,910,928	3,612,026	3,707,284
Brent	1,372,897	1,121,660	1,154,462
Bristol[1]	0	0	549,041
Bromley	0	19,118	22,671
Buckinghamshire	1,063,928	761,564	884,119
Bury	344,965	300,468	308,731
Calderdale	825,187	698,055	658,291
Cambridgeshire	943,296	885,314	910,170
Camden	1,087,986	1,295,303	1,399,822
Cardiff[1]	0	0	353,806
Cheshire	73,862	68,369	70,249
Cleveland[1]	423,708	408,228	0
Coventry	2,108,375	1,931,778	2,036,693
Croydon	949,775	1,082,251	1,187,164
Derbyshire[2]	1,026,633	944,899	1,040,741
Devon	11,949	42,249	59,573
Doncaster	100,338	86,240	88,611
Dorset	0	15,523	20,316

Section 11 Grant: LEA funding for 1994–95 to 1996–97

LEA	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97
Dudley	760,100	689,673	764,936
Durham	119,090	117,811	121,051
Ealing	2,509,484	1,153,361	1,170,173
East Sussex[2]	139,412	180,626	210,224
Enfield	988,054	1,148,465	1,282,706
Essex	25,755	24,258	24,925
Gateshead	22,732	21,211	21,536
Gloucestershire	196,920	201,468	208,837
Greenwich	1,244,814	845,944	869,207
Gwent[1]	192,662	221,407	0
Hackney[2]	2,778,196	2,377,959	2,289,531
Hammersmith and Fulham	632,912	369,128	407,789
Hampshire	558,367	513,435	527,554
Haringey	2,460,693	2,046,716	2,114,106
Harrow	550,753	511,042	528,968
Havering	39,169	35,875	36,862
Hereford and Worcester	175,235	154,930	160,021
Hertfordshire	1,492,311	1,365,025	1,406,571
Hillingdon	266,974	266,493	302,925
Hounslow	1,157,155	1,041,080	1,069,711
Hull[1]	0	0	32,750
Humberside[1]	244,893	232,011	0
Islington	1,169,014	1,199,552	1,232,540
Kensington and Chelsea	820,563	714,954	734,815
Kent	983,921	819,116	827,576
Kingston	105,071	83,838	86,143
Kirklees	2,226,146	1,912,360	1,946,520
Lambeth[2]	979,980	1,145,690	1,167,544
Lancashire	4,320,913	3,553,451	3,777,052
Leeds	1,094,986	731,034	751,450
Leicestershire	2,759,321	2,401,675	2,480,992
Lewisham	1,515,585	951,038	978,279
Lincolnshire	61,319	70,972	72,924
Liverpool	130,702	155,323	158,872
Manchester	1,884,247	1,805,380	1,876,516
Merton[2]	438,356	490,188	509,289
Middlesbrough[1]	0	0	427,995
Newcastle	208,403	209,981	215,756
Newham	1,679,469	1,330,349	1,392,075
Newport[1]	0	0	244,900
Norfolk[2]	68,285	52,246	125,017
North Lincolnshire[1]	0	0	178,098
North East Lincolnshire[1]	0	0	27,543
North Tyneside	115,586	95,879	98,516
North Yorkshire	49,312	44,675	45,903
Northamptonshire	561,848	439,464	451,976
Nottinghamshire	1,239,988	1,159,226	1,213,544
Oldham[2]	1,543,130	1,477,668	1,541,970
Oxfordshire	667,371	425,844	437,555
Redbridge	850,258	873,727	970,010
Richmond	56,225	47,343	48,645
Rochdale[2]	1,091,635	918,569	944,401
Rotherham	313,826	305,061	318,653
Salford	47,498	44,930	45,695
Sandwell	1,211,738	1,044,197	1,072,913
Sheffield	1,434,076	1,124,567	1,152,446
Shropshire	84,104	87,160	93,768
Somerset[2]	0	19,970	40,201
South Glamorgan[1]	392,925	344,337	0
South Tyneside	0	99,071	101,795
Southwark	1,759,616	598,029	644,508
St. Helens	14,043	14,571	15,379
Staffordshire	896,677	654,603	677,458
Stockport	76,079	70,839	72,788
Suffolk	237,235	206,326	212,111
Sunderland	87,284	79,456	81,641
Surrey	262,375	247,145	253,942
Sutton[2]	46,902	60,312	73,755
Swansea[1, 2]	0	0	250,937
Tameside	388,379	327,957	336,976
Tower Hamlets	6,392,945	5,049,154	5,188,006
Trafford	228,686	228,795	264,770
Wakefield	251,031	210,797	230,907
Walsall	1,362,482	1,097,879	1,116,727
Waltham Forest	1,480,809	1,266,507	1,301,336
Wandsworth	1,338,480	1,112,048	1,142,629
Warwickshire	764,395	750,289	770,922
West Glamorgan[1]	0	224,304	0
West Sussex	212,623	192,511	197,805
Westminster	1,350,477	1,252,246	1,340,792
Wigan	44,078	55,801	59,212
Wiltshire	121,565	109,967	112,991
Wirral	75,839	0	0
Wolverhampton	1,440,393	1,145,760	1,174,489
Total	89,018,102	76,270,475	79,368,916

1. Where an authority's allocation of grant covered both education and non-education projects, an estimate has been given, based on the proportion of expenditure on education projects.
2. Figures for 1996–97 reflect grant entitlement. Final payments will be made in 1997–98.
[1] Subject to local government reorganisation in 1995–96.
[2] Payments due to these authorities for the year on the basis of expenditure claimed. Some payments remain to be made.

Deportees

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were deported under Immigration Act powers from the United Kingdom in *(a)* January, *(b)* February, *(c)* March and *(d)* April; and what were the nationalities of those deported. [1926]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is given in the table.

Persons removed[1] from the United Kingdom under the deportation process[2,3]

	January	February	March	April
Albania	—	—	—	*
Algeria	*	3	*	*
Angola	—	*	—	—
Australia	4	*	*	*
Bangladesh	4	5	6	3
Bermuda	*	—	—	—
Brazil	3	*	*	*
Bulgaria	*	—	*	*
Cameroon	—	*	—	—
Canada	—	*	—	*
Chile	*	—	*	—
China	*	—	—	*
Columbia	3	3	*	*
Croatia	*	3	—	*
Cyprus	*	—	4	3
Denmark	—	—	*	*
Ecuador	*	—	*	—
Egypt	*	*	3	*
Ethiopia	*	—	—	*
Gambia	5	*	3	*
Germany	*	*	*	—
Ghana	7	13	12	15
Grenada	—	*	—	—
Guyana	—	*	—	*
Hong Kong—BDTC (Hong Kong)	*	*	*	3
Hungary	*	*	—	*
India	13	10	21	10
Iran	*	*	*	*
Ireland	—	*	—	*
Italy	*	—	—	*
Jamaica	12	16	8	15
Japan	—	—	*	*
Kenya	6	*	*	—
Lebanon	*	*	—	—
Libya (Arab Republic)	—	*	—	*
Lithuania	3	*	4	3
Malaysia	8	5	6	7
Mauritius	*	—	*	—
Morocco	*	—	*	*
Nepal	—	*	—	—

Persons removed[1] from the United Kingdom under the deportation process[2,3]

	January	*February*	*March*	*April*
Netherlands	*	*	*	*
New Zealand	3	—	—	—
Nigeria	14	17	15	16
Pakistan	20	13	13	21
Peru	*	*	*	—
Philippines	*	*	*	*
Poland	5	8	12	5
Portugal	*	*	—	—
Romania	*	*	*	—
Russia	—	*	*	—
Sierra Leone	5	4	*	5
South Africa	4	3	*	*
South Korea	*	3	—	—
Sri Lanka	*	—	—	—
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	—	—	*	*
Tanzania	4	*	*	3
Thailand	—	*	*	*
Trinidad and Tobago	—	*	*	*
Turkey	6	5	3	*
Uganda	*	*	*	*
Ukraine (Ukranian SSR)	3	3	*	*
United States of America	5	*	4	4
Venezuela	*	*	—	—
Zambia	5	*	*	—
Zimbabwe	5	3	5	5
Other[4]	4	4	6	3
All	185	166	164	162

[1] Including voluntary departures after deportation action had been initiated.
[2] Excluding illegal entrants removed.
[3] Provisional data.
[4] Including nationalities where there has been only one deportation during the period.
[5] 1 or 2.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who were convicted of a criminal offence in the United Kingdom, punishable by a prison sentence, were deported as part of their sentence in *(a)* January, *(b)* February and *(c)* March; what the *(a)* nationalities and *(b)* gender were of those deported; and from which prison establishments they were deported. [1929]

Mr. O'Brien: The information requested for January to March is given in the tables.

Persons removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process following a court recommendation[1], first quarter 1997, by gender

	Number
Male	47
Female	12
Total	59

[1] Provisional data.

Persons removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process following a court recommendation[1] first quarter 1997, by nationality

	Number
Jamaica	9
Nigeria	7
Pakistan	4
Ghana	3
Portugal	3
Zambia	3
Angola	2
Columbia	2
Hungary	2
Peru	2
South Africa	2
United States of America	2
Other[2]	18
Total	59

[1] Provisional data.
[2] Includes nationalities where only one person is recorded as deported.

Persons removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process following a court recommendation,[1] first quarter 1997, by month

	Number
January	20
February	24
March	15
Total	59

[1] Provisional data.

Persons removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process following a court recommendation[1] first quarter 1997, by last recorded place of detention

	Number
HMP Holloway	10
HMP Rochester	7
HMP Highdown	5
HMP The Verne	5
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	4
HMP Brixton	3
HMP Cookham Wood	3
HMP Wandsworth	3
HMP Swaleside	2
HMP Wayland	2
Others[2]	15
Total	59

[1] Provisional data.
[2] Includes nationalities where only 1 person is recorded as deported.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were detained under Immigration Act powers, in the United Kingdom during *(a)* Janaury, *(b)* February, *(c)* March and *(d)* April; what the *(a)* nationalities and *(b)* gender were of those detained; and how many were deported. [1930]

Mr. O'Brien: The available information on persons detained under Immigration Act powers, and on the number deported from detention, is given in the tables. The number deported does not include those who are removed as illegal entrants or under port refusal procedures.

Table 1: Number[1] of immigration detainees[2] deported[3] during January, February, March and April 1997

Month	*Number deported*
January	60
February	51

Table 1: Number[1] of immigration detainees[2] deported[3] during January, February, March and April 1997

Month	Number deported
March	55
April	47
Total	213

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.
[3] Removed under the deportation process, including those who departed voluntarily after deportation action had been initiated.

Table 2: Number of people recorded as being detained[1 2 3] under Immigration Act powers, by nationality of detainee, as at selected dates in 1997

Nationality	As at 31 January[4] 1997	As at 27 March 1997	As at 30 April 1997
Albania	4	7	12
Algeria	88	85	89
Angola	11	17	14
Bangladesh	26	17	26
Bulgaria	4	10	6
Cameroon	5	5	4
China	52	57	57
Columbia	13	18	18
Congo	3	3	4
Cyprus	19	13	19
Ecuador	6	7	4
Ethiopia	8	6	8
Gambia	19	16	16
Ghana	40	32	41
India	109	134	155
Iran	7	8	6
Iraq	3	4	4
Israel	17	2	2
Ivory Coast	3	3	6
Jamaica	30	39	43
Kenya	8	12	11
Liberia	9	10	10
Lithuania	10	10	12
Malaysia	6	4	6
Morocco	12	10	11
Nigeria	134	138	126
Pakistan	61	59	64
Poland	13	23	37
Romania	13	17	18
Russia	9	9	8
Sierra Leone	8	7	6
Somalia	8	3	6
South Africa	4	5	5
Sri Lanka	17	16	17
Sudan	7	6	4
Turkey	29	27	22
Uganda	8	7	10
Zaire	39	35	38
Others[5]	63	73	92
Nationality doubtful	11	12	13
Total	936	966	1,050

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] Persons detailed solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971. In some cases the asylum application will have been lodged subsequent to the applicant being detained. The figures include both detained asylum applicants who applied at ports, and those detained in after-entry enforcement work and include those awaiting removal following refusal of asylum, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal.
[3] Excludes non-asylum port cases in detention.
[4] Illegal entrants and those subject to deportation action are as at 31 January and Port cases are as at 3 February.
[5] The "others" category may include nationalities already listed.

Table 3: Number of people recorded as being detained[1 2 3] under Immigration Act powers, by gender of detainee, as at selected dates in 1997

Gender	As at 31 January[4] 1997	As at 27 March 1997	As at 30 April 1997
Male	851	884	950
Female	85	82	100
Total	936	966	1,050

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971. In some cases the asylum application will have been lodged subsequent to the applicant being detained. The figures include both detained asylum applicants who applied at ports, and those detained in after-entry enforcement work and include those awaiting removal following refusal of asylum, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal.
[3] Excludes non-asylum port cases in detention.
[4] Illegal entrants and those subject to deportation action are as at 31 January and Port cases are as at 3 February.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many notices of intention to deport were issued in *(a)* January, *(b)* February, *(c)* March and *(d)* April. [1935]

Mr. O'Brien: The information requested for January to April 1997 is given in the table.

Persons issued, under the deportation process, with a notice of intention to deport[1], January to April 1997.

	Number
January	480
February	490
March	539
April	492

[1] Provisional data.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to give asylum detainees access to the judicial process. [922]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: All detainees held under powers conferred by the Immigration Acts, some of whom may be asylum seekers, already have some access to the judicial process and are able to take legal advice. Posters advertising the services of organisations such as the Refugee Legal Centre, which offers advice free of charge, are prominently displayed in detention centres. The right to apply for bail to an independent adjudicator is open to most of those in detention, including asylum seekers. It is open to any asylum seeker to seek a judicial review of his or her case at any time.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in the United Kingdom *(a)* applied for asylum and *(b)* were granted asylum in (i) January, (ii) February (iii) March and (iv) April; and what were their nationalities. [1927]

Mr. O'Brien: The requested information is given in the following tables.

Table 1: Applications[1] received for asylum in the UK, excluding dependants, and initial decisions[2,3] by nationality January 1997

Number of principal applicants

	Applications	*Decisions*		
Applications		*Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum*	*Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave*	*Refused asylum and exceptional leave*
Europe				
Bulgaria	35	—	—	45
Cyprus	65	—	—	55
Poland	90	—	—	125
Romania	30	—	—	35
Former USSR	220	*	—	20
Turkey	165	5	—	130
Former Yugoslavia	110	155	40	35
Others	30	—	—	10
Total	755	165	40	455
Americas				
Colombia	110	*	—	35
Others	80	*	*	45
Total	190	5	*	80
Middle East				
Iran	35	40	5	30
Iraq	90	10	25	5
Lebanon	15	*	5	5
Others	50	5	5	20
Total	195	60	35	60
Africa				
Algeria	55	5	—	100
Angola	15	5	*	50
Cameroon	20	—	—	10
Ethiopia	10	5	10	20
Gambia	5	—	—	35
Ghana	20	*	—	145
Ivory Coast	*	5	—	20
Kenya	40	*	*	70
Liberia	15	—	10	10
Nigeria	60	*	*	350
Rwanda	5	—	—	*
Sierra Leone	*	—	*	95
Somalia	170	—	240	35
South Africa	*	—	—	20
Sudan	25	10	*	25
Tanzania	*	—	*	75
Togo	5	—	—	10
Uganda	10	*	5	30
Zaire	45	*	10	80
Zimbabwe	*	—	—	10
Others	25	—	5	30
Total	530	30	285	1,210
Asia				
Afghanistan	45	5	55	*
Bangladesh	15	—	—	55
China	300	*	*	50
India	50	—	*	265
Pakistan	65	—	—	190
Sri Lanka	95	5	—	175
Others	25	—	—	30
Total	595	10	60	770
Other and unknown nationalities	10	—	—	—
Grand total	2,275	265	415	2,580

[1] Figures rounded to nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2.
[2] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same month.
[3] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

Table 2: Applications[1] received for asylum in the UK, excluding dependants, and initial decisions[2,3] by nationality January 1997

Number of principal applicants

	Applications	*Decisions*		
		Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	*Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave*	*Refused asylum and exceptional leave*
Europe				
Bulgaria	20	*	—	25
Cyprus	40	—	—	25
Poland	40	—	—	105
Romania	10	—	—	15
Former USSR	155	—	—	25
Turkey	125	10	*	140
Former Yugoslavia	135	220	20	40
Others	40	—	—	15
Total	565	230	20	390
Americas				
Colombia	190	5	—	25
Others	85	—	*	50
Total	270	5	*	70
Middle East				
Iran	50	20	5	25
Iraq	70	15	30	10
Lebanon	5	*	5	10
Others	25	10	5	30
Total	150	50	45	75
Africa				
Algeria	35	5	—	75
Angola	30	—	*	65
Cameroon	10	—	—	15
Ethiopia	10	*	10	25
Gambia	*	*	—	30
Ghana	20	—	—	105
Ivory Coast	10	—	—	20
Kenya	40	—	*	105
Liberia	15	—	10	25
Nigeria	55	*	*	350
Rwanda	10	—	—	—
Sierra Leone	5	—	—	70
Somalia	105	*	170	25
South Africa	*	—	*	5
Sudan	10	5	*	20
Tanzania	5	—	—	50
Togo	5	*	—	5
Uganda	15	*	5	35
Zaire	40	5	5	70
Zimbabwe	*	—	—	10
Others	30	—	*	30
Total	455	20	205	1,135
Asia				
Afghanistan	65	—	100	5
Bangladesh	15	—	—	55
China	230	—	—	50
India	35	*	—	240
Pakistan	70	—	*	175
Sri Lanka	90	*	*	185
Others	20	—	—	20
Total	525	*	105	730
Other and unknown nationalities	15	—	—	5
Grand total	1,985	305	375	2,410

[1] Figures rounded to nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2.
[2] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same month.
[3] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

Table 3: Applications[1] received for asylum in the UK, excluding dependants, and initial decisions[2,3] by nationality March 1997

Number of principal applicants

	Applications	Decisions		
		Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave	Refused asylum and exceptional leave
Europe				
Bulgaria	35	*	—	20
Cyprus	50	—	—	35
Poland	30	—	—	80
Romania	15	—	—	35
Former USSR	140	—	—	40
Turkey	105	*	*	120
Former Yugoslavia	65	180	20	30
Others	60	—	—	55
Total	505	185	20	415
Americas				
Colombia	235	—	—	20
Others	115	—	—	25
Total	350	—	—	45
Middle East				
Iran	45	30	5	15
Iraq	65	25	25	10
Lebanon	10	5	5	10
Others	30	15	*	40
Total	150	70	35	75
Africa				
Algeria	45	*	—	95
Angola	20	*	5	40
Cameroon	5	—	—	25
Ethiopia	15	—	5	30
Gambia	*	—	—	30
Ghana	20	—	—	150
Ivory Coast	5	—	—	25
Kenya	35	10	*	95
Liberia	15	5	5	15
Nigeria	55	*	*	335
Rwanda	10	—	*	—
Sierra Leone	5	—	*	75
Somalia	130	5	—	35
South Africa	*	—	—	5
Sudan	10	5	*	10
Tanzania	*	—	—	55
Togo	*	—	*	15
Uganda	15	*	*	15
Zaire	35	5	5	50
Zimbabwe	5	—	—	5
Others	20	*	5	25
Total	440	35	35	1,140
Asia				
Afghanistan	50	5	50	5
Bangladesh	10	—	—	50
China	135	*	—	35
India	20	—	*	250
Pakistan	55	*	*	200
Sri Lanka	85	*	—	170
Others	15	—	—	25
Total	365	5	55	735
Other and unknown nationalities	10	—	—	—
Grand total	1,820	295	140	2,410

[1] Figures rounded to nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2.
[2] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same month.
[3] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

Table 4: Applications[1] received for asylum in the UK, excluding dependants, and initial decisions[2,3] by nationality April 1997

Number of principal applicants

	Applications	Decisions		
		Recognised as a refugee and granted asylum	Not recognised as a refugee but granted exceptional leave	Refused asylum and exceptional leave
Europe				
Bulgaria	45	—	—	20
Cyprus	20	—	—	20
Poland	30	—	—	130
Romania	50	—	—	35
Former USSR	180	—	—	40
Turkey	80	5	*	120
Former Yugoslavia	155	190	10	70
Others	85	—	—	30
Total	640	195	15	500
Americas				
Colombia	290	—	—	35
Others	150	*	—	40
Total	440	*	—	75
Middle East				
Iran	50	10	*	25
Iraq	75	15	35	15
Lebanon	10	—	5	10
Others	40	5	10	25
Total	175	30	50	70
Africa				
Algeria	35	5	—	65
Angola	15	*	*	60
Cameroon	15	—	—	10
Ethiopia	10	5	*	25
Gambia	5	—	—	35
Ghana	15	*	—	165
Ivory Coast	5	*	—	20
Kenya	55	—	*	140
Liberia	15	*	*	15
Nigeria	45	*	5	475
Rwanda	10	—	—	5
Sierra Leone	15	—	—	80
Somalia	165	5	—	35
South Africa	5	—	—	*
Sudan	20	5	5	25
Tanzania	10	—	—	65
Togo	5	—	—	5
Uganda	20	—	5	50
Zaire	50	5	15	5
Zimbabwe	5	*	*	10
Others	25	*	5	65
Total	540	30	40	1,345
Asia				
Afghanistan	75	*	70	10
Bangladesh	15	—	5	65
China	175	*	*	100
India	25	—	—	295
Pakistan	65	—	5	305
Sri Lanka	90	5	*	160
Others	20	—	*	15
Total	465	5	80	955
Other and unknown nationalities	15	—	—	—
Grand total	2,275	265	185	2,945

[1] Figures rounded to nearest 5, with * = 1 or 2.
[2] Decision figures do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same month.
[3] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers were held in detention in the United Kingdom at the end of (i) January, (ii) February, (iii) March and (iv) April; in which establishments they were held; what the *(a)* nationalities and *(b)* gender were of those detained; how many were deported; and from which establishments. [1928]

Mr. O'Brien: The available information on asylum seekers detained, and on the number deported from detention is given in the tables. The number deported does not include those who are removed as illegal entrants or under port refusal procedures.

Table 1: Number of people recorded as being detained [1] [2] who had sought asylum at some stage, by detention location, as at selected dates in 1997

	As at 31 Janaury[3] 1997	As at 27 March 1997	As at 30 April 1997
Prison			
HMP Armley	3	3	3
HMP Birmingham	16	15	10
HMP Bristol	2	2	3
HMP Brixton	5	3	5
HMP Greenock	11	14	19
HMP Haslar	92	89	82
HMP Holloway	2	2	2
HMP Liverpool	4	3	2
HMP Magilligan	4	8	10
HMP Manchester	4	3	3
HMP Rochester	139	132	129
HMP Wandsworth	6	6	4
HMP Wormwood Scrubs	9	8	7
Other prison[4]	27	25	19
Other places of detention			
Campsfield House	159	141	137
Dover Harbour	6	5	5
Harmondsworth	88	89	91
Manchester Airport	6	7	8
Meavdale Buildings	32	24	36
Police Cells	35	71	84
Queens Buildings	12	13	15
Tinsley House	104	111	114
Other place[4]	2	3	9
Total	768	777	797

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedule 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971. In some cases the asylum application will have been lodged subsequent to the applicant being detained. The figures include both detained asylum applicants who applied at ports, and those detained in after-entry enforcement work and include those awaiting removal following refusal of asylum, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal.

[3] Illegal entrants and those subject to deportation action are as at 31 January and Port cases are as at 3 February.

[4] The "other" categories may include locations already listed.

Table 2: Number of people recorded as being detained [1] [2] who had sought asylum at some stage, by nationality of detainee, as at selected dates in 1997

Nationality	As at 31 January[3] 1997	As at 27 March 1997	As at 30 April 1997
Albania	4	6	11
Algeria	78	78	75
Angola	11	17	14
Bangladesh	15	13	21
Bulgaria	4	10	6
China	48	53	53
Columbia	10	18	16
Congo	3	3	4
Cyprus	18	12	17
Ethiopia	7	6	7
Gambia	15	13	13
Ghana	37	30	28
India	96	116	129
Iran	7	8	6
Iraq	3	4	4
Ivory Coast	3	3	6
Jamaica	10	9	8
Kenya	7	9	11
Liberia	8	10	10
Lithuania	10	8	7
Morocco	6	6	5
Nigeria	108	109	101
Pakistan	44	42	49
Poland	7	10	11
Romania	13	16	13
Russia	8	6	7
Sierra Leone	7	6	5
Sri Lanka	16	14	14
Sudan	7	6	4
Turkey	28	26	21
Uganda	8	7	7
Zaire	38	33	37
Other[4]	75	62	70
Nationality doubtful	9	8	7
Total	768	777	797

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971. In some cases the asylum application will have been lodged subsequent to the applicant being detained. The figures include both detained asylum applicants who applied at ports, and those detained in after-entry enforcement work and include those awaiting removal following refusal of asylum, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal.

[3] Illegal entrants and those subject to deportation action are as at 31 January and Port cases are as at 3 February.

[4] The 'other' categories may include nationalities already listed.

Table 3: Number of people recorded as being detained [1] [2] who had sought asylum at some stage, by gender of detainee, as at selected dates in 1997

Gender	As at 31 January[3] 1997	As at 27 March 1997	As at 30 April 1997
Male	698	714	730
Female	70	63	67
Total	768	777	797

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971. In some cases the asylum application will have been lodged subsequent to the applicant being detained. The figures include both detained asylum applicants who applied at ports, and those detained in after-entry enforcement work and include those awaiting removal following refusal of asylum, as well as those applications were under consideration or subject to appeal.

[3] Illegal entrants and those subject to deportation action are as at 31 January and Port cases are as at 3 February.

Table 4: Number of asylum detainees [1] [2] recorded as being deported [3], by location of detention [4], January to April 1997

	Number of deported asylum detainees
Prison	
HMP Rochester	8
HMP Haslar	3
Other prison	7
Other places of detention	
Tinsley House	7
Harmondsworth	3
Meadvale Buildings	2
Queens Building	2
Other	12
Total	44

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971.
[3] Removed under the deportation process, including those who departed voluntarily after deportation action had been initiated.
[4] Information is of the last recorded detention location.

Immigration

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in each of the last five years, having been given exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom, were refused extension of that leave *(a)* after one year and *(b)* after four years. [2097]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I regret that the information requested is not held centrally.

Essex Constabulary

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in the Essex Constabulary on *(a)* 1 April 1979, *(b)* 1 April 1983, *(c)* 1 April 1987, *(d)* 1 April 1992 and *(e)* 1 April 1997. [2079]

Mr. Michael: The information available is set out in the table:

Essex police

Year [1]	*Number of police officers*
1979	2,461
1983	2,641
1987	2,725
1992	2,898
1997 [2]	2,961

[1] As at 31 March.
[2] Provisional.

WPC Yvonne Fletcher

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new evidence he has examined relating to the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher; and if he will make a statement. [2087]

Mr. Straw: The investigation of the murder of WPC Yvonne Fletcher is a matter for the police who I understand are keeping this matter under review. Anyone who has new evidence relating to this crime should pass it to them.

Immigration Officers (Heathrow)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration officers are employed at each of the terminals at Heathrow Airport. [2159]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 1 May 1997, the following numbers of immigration officers were employed at Heathrow airport:

Terminal 1: 152

Terminal 2: 165

Terminal 3: 251

Terminal 4: 162.

Policing

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police authorities in England and Wales indicating the number of people in the area served per police officer in each case and ranking the authorities in descending order of population per officer. [2256]

Mr. Michael: The information requested is set out in the table:

Police force	*Population per police officer* [1]
Suffolk	557
Thames Valley	554
North Yorkshire	546
West Mercia	546
Norfolk	539
Warwickshire	539
Devon and Cornwall	538
Derbyshire	535
Cambridgeshire	533
Dorset	529
Wiltshire	512
Lincolnshire	512
Northamptonshire	509
Essex	509
Hampshire	505
Bedfordshire	499
Avon and Somerset	489
Gloucestershire	488
Hertfordshire	488
North Wales	481
Surrey	478
Cheshire	478
Staffordshire	478
Kent	476
Sussex	474
Leicestershire	474
Dyfed-Powys	472
Gwent	447
Nottinghamshire	444
Lancashire	439
Humberside	435
Cumbria	428
Durham	416
South Yorkshire	413
South Wales	412
West Yorkshire	404
Northumbria	391
Cleveland	383
Greater Manchester	372
West Midlands	371
Merseyside	337
Metropolitan	281
City of London	6

[1] Based on OPCS population data as at 30 June 1995 and police force numbers as at 31 March 1997.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make provision for the siting of CCTV cameras in parts of rural towns where vandalism is a persistent problem. [2362]

Mr. Michael: I am considering the future of the closed circuit television Challenge Competition as part of our review of existing expenditure programmes. A decision on whether there will be another round of the competition in 1998–99 will be made later in the summer.

Criminal Record Certificates

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to implement part V of the Police Act 1997; and what plans he has to provide for the waiving or abatement of charges to volunteers for the certificates referred to in the Act. [2383]

Mr. Michael: We are currently considering the detailed implications of part V of the Police Act 1997. In fulfilment of the undertaking I gave to the House during the report stage we will be consulting the voluntary sector before any final decisions are reached.

Merseyside Constabulary

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in the Merseyside Constabulary on *(a)* 1 April 1979, *(b)* 1 April 1983, *(c)* 1 April 1987, *(d)* 1 April 1992 and *(e)* 1 April 1997. [2481]

Mr. Michael: The information available is set out in the table:

Merseyside police

Year[1]	*Number of police officers*
1979	4,427
1983	4,631
1987	4,598
1992	4,621
1997[2]	4,230

[1] As at 31 March.
[2] Provisional.

Radioactive Waste Disposal (Hurd Deep)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requests he has had from the State of Jersey Authorities to discuss the report commissioned from Professor Sir John Knill and Dr. Mike Romerill concerning the disposal of radioactive waste in the Hurd Deep which was published in May. [2676]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: None.

Bribery and Corruption

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take to reform and consolidate the law on corruption with particular reference to bribery of hon. Members. [3047]

Mr. Straw: The Government are committed to tackling corruption in all areas of public and private life, including the bribery of hon. Members.

I am publishing today a statement on reform of the corruption statutes for consultation. A copy is available in the Library. The Law Commission will be producing proposals for reform of the law in this area later in the year.

I shall consider carefully the results of all of these exercises, together with any further recommendations which the Nolan Committee may make in relation to the criminal law.

I expect to make a further statement on the reform of the law in this area early next year.

Controlled Drugs (Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there were against people for *(a)* dealing in and *(b)* possessing controlled drugs in Lancashire for each year since 1992. [1635]

Mr. Michael: The available information is given in the table.

Number of persons convicted within the Lancashire police force area for specific drug offences[1], 1992–95

Offence	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Production or being concerned in the production of a controlled drug	25	26	42	46
Supplying or offering to supply a controlled drug	72	54	73	117
Possession of a controlled drug with intent to supply	92	80	115	160
Possession of a controlled drug	444	295	380	618

[1] Principal offence only.

.22 Calibre Pistols (Deaths)

Mr. Olner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been killed with .22 calibre pistols in the last 10 years. [1630]

Mr. Michael: In the past, information on the calibre of firearms used in homicide offences has not been collected centrally in England and Wales as a matter of routine.

However, a special exercise was conducted last year, and subsequently updated this year, to find out further information on homicides involving firearms.

This covered the three years 1992 to 1994, and out of a total of 90 homicides involving the use of a handgun, information was available in 76 cases to show that seven persons were killed with a .22 calibre handgun. It is not known, however, what type of .22 cartridge was used.

For the remaining 69 cases, the calibre of the handguns involved, as reported by the police forces concerned, is as follows:

Calibre	*Number of handguns*
9mm	12
.32	20
.38	17
.45	9
.357	4
.375	1
.445	1
.455	3
.635	2

WALES

Teachers

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the availability of full-time posts for unemployed teachers in Wales. [2002]

Mr. Hain: Local authorities and grant-maintained schools reported that, as at January 1997, there were 102 vacancies for full-time teachers in maintained secondary, primary and special schools in Wales. This represents less than 0.5 per cent. of teachers employed by local authorities and grant-maintained schools in Wales. It is open to any suitably qualified teacher to apply for appointment to a vacant post in Wales.

Red Barn Development

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a statement on the decision of Gwent health authority to cancel the proposed Red Barn development; [2374]

(2) what role the private finance initiative has played in the Red Barn proposal at Nevill Hall hospital, Abergavenny. [2376]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Gwent Community Health Trust sought private sector interest under the Private Finance Initiative as required by the Department. A preferred bidder was selected and negotiations had been continuing.

Gwent Health Authority's decision was taken because costs had increased, value for money was not demonstrated sufficiently, and the proposals no longer met the demand for services. The Authority will now discuss needs with local people, local authorities and other interested parties. This is a matter for the Health Authority and they have to decide on the most cost effective way of delivering services for their communities.

Pen y Fal Hospital

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what receipts accrued to his Department from the closure of Pen y Fal Hospital, Abergavenny. [2372]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Pen y Fal Hospital site has not yet been sold and no receipts have accrued to the department.

Gwent Community Health Trust are at present marketing the major part of the site and interested parties have been asked to prepare a bid.

Chepstow Community Hospital

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the proposed Chepstow community hospital. [2375]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Glan Hafren NHS Trust in collaboration with local GPs, and with the support of Gwent Health Authority, are working on a proposal for a new Neighbourhood Health Unit to be built on the St. Lawrence Hospital site at Chepstow. The unit will provide for a range of primary, continuing, mental health, diagnostic and acute services. The development is a Private Finance Initiative and the Trust are currently in the final stages of negotiation with the private sector consortium.

Ovarian Cancer

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the availability of screening programmes via NHS hospitals for ovarian cancer in Wales. [2189]

Mr. Win Griffiths: I have made no specific assessment of the availability of screening programmes for ovarian cancer. Professional advice is that there is currently no screening test assessed as effective which can be used on a population basis.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the future of the private finance initiative in relation to the national health service. [2379]

Mr. Win Griffiths: As my hon. Friend knows, the Government is currently undertaking an urgent review of the Private Finance Initiative. This is being led by the Paymaster General. In addition, officials in the Welsh Office Health Department are working with their colleagues in the Department of Health to determine what changes are necessary to ensure the PFI delivers the range of health care facilities which so far it has failed to do. As a first step, we have introduced the NHS (Private Finance) Bill in order to provide the necessary assurance to the private sector that Trusts can enter into PFI contracts. This should break the current logjam of projects.

We expect all of this work to be completed quickly. The review led by my hon. Friend will report by 13 June. Officials are working to a slightly longer timetable; and if all goes well, the Bill will be enacted before the summer recess. We are determined to give the PFI a new impetus so that we can start building new health facilities to carry us through to the 21st Century.

Chepstow Bypass

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the proposed outer bypass for Chepstow. [2369]

Mr. Hain: A proposal has been put forward by a private developer for an outer bypass for Chepstow partly funded by residential development on the English side of the border. Most of the route is in England and will require planning approval from local authorities in the area.

DEFENCE

Navy Personnel

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy personnel are currently employed ashore; and what were the equivalent figures in *(a)* 1981 and *(b)* 1988. [2395]

Dr. John Reid: Available statistics show that 25,252 Naval Service personnel were employed ashore at home and overseas on 1 April 1997; 44,352 on 31 March 1988; and 50,749 on 31 March 1981.

National Service

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact on occupational pensions rights of interrupted employment resulting from national service; and if he will make a statement. [2141]

Dr. John Reid: Public Service pension schemes allow members who had their careers interrupted by national service to credit that period towards their pension. The impact of National Service on the pension rights of members of occupational schemes outside the public service will depend upon the rules of the relevant scheme and the effect of the application of Inland Revenue limits on final retirement benefits.

European Court of Human Rights

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make representations to the European Court of Human Rights to bring forward the date of the appeal tribunal concerning McGinley and EEV UK. [1969]

Dr. John Reid: I have no plans to make representations to the European Court of Human Rights to bring forward its hearing of the case being brought by McGinley and Egan. It is, of course, open to the two applicants to do so.

Departmental Land

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the acreage of land *(a)* owned and *(b)* leased by his Department; and what were the equivalent figures in (i) 1974 and (ii) 1979. [2393]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Estate Organisation Agency. I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from B. L. Hirst to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 9 June 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about MOD land holdings as this matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief Executive of the Defence Estate Organisation.

The details of the land held by the Ministry of Defence at 31 March 1974, 1979 and 1997 are as follows:

Acres

Date	*Freehold*	*Leasehold*	*Total*
31 March 1974	593,723	54,142	647,865
31 March 1979	579,478	41,640	621,118
31 March 1997	553,317	38,978	592,295

I hope this is helpful.

Gallium Removal

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to undertake the removal of gallium from the military plutonium stockpile; and what assessment he has made of the discharges to the environment arising from this removal. [1785]

Mr. Spellar: When plutonium is returned from service use the gallium is removed in conditions designed to protect both the operators involved and the environment at large. As far as this Department is aware, there have been no discharges to the environment arising from such removal.

Regimental Strengths

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was *(a)* the establishment and *(b)* the nominal strength on 1 May of (i) The Duke of Wellington's Regiment, (ii) The Green Howards, (iii) The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire, (iv) The Light Infantry, (v) The Royal Dragoon Guards, (vi) The Light Dragoons and (vii) The 1 Royal Tank Regiment. [2014]

Dr. John Reid: The establishments and strengths are as follows:

Unit	*Establishment*	*Strengths*	*Surplus/deficit*
1st Battalion The Duke of Wellingtons Regiment	519	573	+54
1st Battalion The Green Howards	625	603	–22
1st Battalion The Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire	519	512	–7
The Light Infantry			
1st Battalion	539	476	–63
2nd Battalion	555	522	–33
The Royal Dragoon Guards	406	402	–4
The Light Dragoons	388	383	–5
1st Royal Tank Regiment	398	359	–39

MOD Police, Colchester

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence police constables on the complement were operating full time within the Colchester garrison on *(a)* 1 January and *(b)* 1 June; and what is the number planned for 1 October 1997. [2078]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Constable and Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency. I have asked him to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. J. A. Smallwood to Mr Bob Russell, dated 9 June 1997:

I am replying to your Question to the Secretary of State for Defence about Ministry of Defence Police at Colchester Garrison, on behalf of the Chief Constable/Chief Executive of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency, as this falls into his area of responsibility. The Chief Constable/Chief Executive is away from the office at present.

There were 30 uniformed MOD Police officers of the rank of constable deployed at Colchester Garrison on 1 January and 25 on 1 June 1997. Based on current planning assumptions we anticipate that there will be 21 MDP constables deployed in and around the Colchester Garrison area on 1 October 1997.

Flagship Training Ltd.

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposal to transfer the running of naval training to Flagship Training Ltd.; and if he will consider allowing affected employees to remain within his Department for the foreseeable future. [2005]

Dr. John Reid: No proposals exist to transfer the running of Royal Naval training to the private sector. The management and control of RN training will remain the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA)/Flag Officer Training and Recruiting and the Commanding Officers of his shore training establishments.

Proposals are currently being considered for the transfer of a number of, mainly support, NRTA activities to Flagship Training Ltd. which would involve the transfer of some employees under the provisions of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (TUPE).

All Agency employees who may be affected by these proposals have been given the opportunity to register a preference to stay within the Department. Every effort is being made to find alternative posts for those who have registered such a preference.

I will write to the hon. Member when a final decision has been taken on the activity transfer.

Eurofighter Project

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his discussion with the German Minister of Defence on the future of the Eurofighter Project, if he will make a statement on the outcome of his meetings and give details of specific assurances he received about future German funding of the production investment and production phases of the project. [2493]

Mr. Spellar: When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence met the German Defence Minister on 4 June in Bonn he pointed out that the Government was firmly committed to the Eurofighter programme and that the UK wanted to proceed rapidly to the production phase. He confirmed that the UK was ready to sign the relevant Memoranda of Understanding now. In turn Herr Rühe made it very clear that Germany needed and wanted Eurofighter. He hoped to secure Cabinet approval to proceed to the production phase of Eurofighter on 11 July when the German Cabinet meets to consider the 1998 Federal Budget. The approval of the Bundestag Parliament will then need to be obtained as soon as possible thereafter in advance of signature of the relevant Memoranda of Understanding by the four partner nations.

When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met Chancellor Kohl in Bonn on 6 June, the Chancellor made very clear his personal commitment to the Eurofighter programme and his aim to secure the German Government's commitment to the production phase in July within the framework of the draft 1998 Federal budget.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Broiler Chickens

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the present stocking density for table broiler chickens. [1902]

Mr. Morley: A maximum stocking density of 34 kg/m^2 is recommended for broilers in the welfare code on domestic fowls. We will consider whether this provision needs changing in the light of *(a)* the results of scientific work commissioned following a recommendation from the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) in 1992 and *(b)* the further advice FAWC has undertaken to give when those scientific results are available.

Laying Hens

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for a total ban on all cage systems for laying hens throughout the EU. [1903]

Mr. Morley: The Government will be seeking substantial improvements to the EU welfare requirements for laying hens during the forthcoming review by the Council of Ministers of the battery hens directive 88/166/EEC. The detailed objectives will be determined in the light of the Farm Animal Welfare Council's report on the welfare of laying hens, which we expect to be published shortly.

Ostriches

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to ban the keeping of ostriches on United Kingdom farms; and if he will make a statement. [1904]

Mr. Morley: I am aware of the concerns expressed about ostrich farming in this country. This Government are committed to promoting animal welfare and intend to look closely at the welfare implications of this developing industry.

Fisheries

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he will be taking to renew the six mile and twelve mile fisheries limits. [2293]

Mr. Morley: The current restrictions on foreign fishing vessels within our six and 12 mile fisheries limits will continue to apply until 31 December 2002. The Government are committed to securing their renewal after 2002 as part of the process of reviewing the Common Fisheries Policy.

Beef Exports

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representation his Department has made to the European Commissioner for Agriculture about lifting the ban on the export of beef. [2526]

Mr. Rooker: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food met Commissioner Fischler on 12 May and their discussions covered, amongst other matters, the way forward on lifting the export ban. It was stressed that the Government will respect the framework set by the Florence Agreement and work constructively with the Commission and through the European Parliament on making progress on this issue. However, it is for Madame Bonino, the Consumer Health and Food Safety Commissioner, whom my right hon. Friend also met in May, to arrange scientific consideration of the UK's proposals for an Export Certified Herd Scheme. The results of this scrutiny are expected later this month.

ADAS

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the present situation with regard to ADAS; and if he will make a statement. [2632]

Mr. Morley: The sale of ADAS to a management and employee buy out team was completed on 1 April 1997 and it is now trading as a private limited company. ADAS's statutory functions and work directly concerned with the payment of grants and subsidies were not included in the privatisation and are now being carried out by the Farming and Rural Conservation Agency, an executive agency of MAFF and the Welsh Office.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what allergic reactions have been established as being caused by the introduction of genetically engineered material into the food chain. [1961]

Mr. Rooker: We have no evidence that any allergic reactions have resulted from the genetic modification of food approved for use in the UK. All such foods are fully assessed by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes for safety, including allergic potential, before being permitted to enter the food supply.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the possible increase in *(a)* resistance to antibiotics and *(b)* severe immune reactions from the use of genetically engineered viruses as delivery vehicles in the generation of transgenic plants and animals. [1962]

Mr. Rooker: None of the GMOs released into the environment in the UK have involved the use of genetically modified viruses as delivery vehicles in the generation of transgenic plants and animals. The use of antibiotic resistance markers is kept under close review by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy regarding the transfer of animal genes into plants; and what consultations his Department has held with vegetarian groups and religious groups on this issue. [1963]

Mr. Rooker: In 1992 the Polkinghorne Committee was set up to consider ethical issues associated with genetically modified (GM) foods. Following extensive consultation with interested parties, including religious and vegetarian groups, the Committee issued a report, a copy of which was deposited in the Library of the House.

Any plant containing animal genes which is intended for food use would need to be approved and labelled in accordance with the EC Novel Foods Regulation (258/97) before it could be sold to the public. As part of this process a thorough safety assessment would be carried out by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes and, if the plant was also intended to be grown in Europe, by the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment. To date no applications for plants of this type have been received.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy regarding the use in food of genetically engineered bacteria to produce the supplement tryptophan. [1964]

Mr. Rooker: The addition of tryptophan to food is prohibited under the Tryptophan in Food Regulations 1990.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy in respect of crops engineered to produce their own pesticides. [1967]

Mr. Rooker: Before any genetically modified crop can be marketed in Europe it requires a marketing consent under Directive 90/220/EEC or approval under the EC novel foods regulation 258/97 based on a detailed safety assessment. Provided that such a consent or approval is given, I cannot see any reason why the use of such crops should not be allowed.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to introduce a moratorium on the release of genetically modified organisms. [1968]

Mr. Rooker: No. The release of genetically modified organisms is only permitted following risk assessment in accordance with Directive 90/220/EEC or the EC novel foods regulation (258/97) and I am satisfied that this procedure provides a sufficient safeguard as regards public health and the environment.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to introduce full disclosure labelling for genetically engineered foods. [1959]

Mr. Rooker: I am committed to ensuring that consumers are able to make an informed choice when purchasing food. I therefore intend to press at European level for the labelling of all foods that may contain ingredients which have been genetically modified.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of genetically engineered foods. [1960]

Mr. Rooker: The EC novel foods and novel food ingredients regulation 258/97 lays down an EU wide pre-market approval system for novel foods and novel food ingredients including those containing or produced from genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Provided that there are no safety concerns, and they are appropriately labelled, I see no reason why these types of foods and ingredients should not be sold to the public.

Forestry Commission (Woodlands)

Mr. Bayley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many acres of woodland are managed currently by the Forestry Commission in each of the standard regions of England. [2683]

Mr. Morley: The subject of the question relates to matters undertaken by Forest Enterprise. I have asked its Chief Executive, Dr. Bob McIntosh, to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Bob McIntosh to Mr. Hugh Bayley, dated 9 June 1997:

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your Question about the area of woodland currently managed by the Forestry Commission in England.(2683)

The Forestry Commission's woodlands in England are divided between two Regions and the total area of land managed by each at 31 March 1996 was:-

North and East England: 159,171 hectares

South and West England: 106,064 hectares

The Forestry Commission's Annual Report for 1995–96 provides greater detail, on pages 106–107, including the area managed by each Forest District together with a map of the boundaries of the administrative regions. A copy is in the library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to ensure that her Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if she will make a statement. [1240]

Mr. Murphy: All Northern Ireland Departments are actively working on the millennium problem. Departments are currently identifying which systems will be liable to failure, and will initiate projects to take the necessary remedial action as a matter of priority.

Nursing Care

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she will extend legislation to Northern Ireland to permit local authorities in England and Wales to pay for residential nursing care in Northern Ireland and vice versa. [1316]

Mr. Worthington: The legislation governing the provision of residential and nursing home care, both in Northern Ireland and England and Wales, does not permit authorities to arrange to pay for placements within each other's territories. I have asked officials to consider, with the Department of Health, ways of overcoming this difficulty.

Civil Service

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what restrictions have been placed on Sir David Fell, the resigning head of the Northern Ireland civil service in relation to taking up commercial employment; and if he will be paid the standard retirement pension in advance of the normal civil service retirement age. [1320]

Mr. Murphy: Sir David Fell sought permission from the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments to take up the post of non-executive Chairman of the Northern Bank and non-executive Director in its parent, National Australia Bank (UK) Ltd. The Committee's recommendation to the previous Secretary of State was that the application should be approved, subject only to the automatic three month waiting period for Permanent Secretaries. Accordingly, there will be a three month gap between Sir David's retirement on 30 September 1997 and the commencement of his employment with the Northern Bank on 1 January 1998.

Sir David Fell is retiring from the Northern Ireland Civil Service before normal retirement age. The terms of his pension will be strictly within the provisions of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme.

Tower Hill, Armagh

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated final cost of works at Tower Hill, Armagh, for the Headquarters of the Southern Area Health Board; and how many showers are provided in these buildings for *(a)* members of staff and *(b)* board members. [1291]

Mr. Worthington: The cost, including fees, of refurbishment work at Tower Hill, Armagh, for the headquarters of the Southern Area Health Board was £1,190,000. There is one shower provided for the use both of staff and board members.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will review the incapacity benefit all work test and make it her policy to replace it with a work-related scheme. [1322]

Mr. Worthington: The Secretary of State for Social Security is considering the evidence submitted to the Social Security Select Committee's review of incapacity benefit. In keeping with the principle of parity in social security matters any changes introduced in Great Britain will be mirrored in Northern Ireland.

Family Law Act

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate she has made of the cost of the academic inquiry into the possibility of

extending the Family Law Act 1996 to Northern Ireland; and for what reason that inquiry was commissioned. [1321]

Mr. Murphy: The Family Law Act 1996 contains provisions relating to domestic violence and occupation of the family home, and the grounds for divorce. After examining the practicalities of direct extension, it was considered that proceedings by way of Order in Council would produce the most coherent and easily understood provisions on domestic violence.

As regards the ground for divorce, it was considered that most information and public debate in the way that current divorce law is used in Northern Ireland was required before a decision could be taken on the way forward. It was for this reason that a major research project into divorce practice and procedure was commissioned and Ministers will await the outcome of that research before formulating any proposals for reform of the divorce law in Northern Ireland. The total cost of the research project is estimated at £50,000.

Stalking

Mr. Robert McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she plans to introduce an Order in Council bringing Northern Ireland legislation on stalking into line with the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. [1319]

Mr. Ingram: The Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 was made under the negative resolution procedure at Privy Council on 8 April and laid before Parliament on 14 May. Neither the Protection from Harassment Act nor the Order in Council have been commenced. It is my intention to introduce the Northern Ireland legislation simultaneously with the commencement of that for England and Wales.

Disability

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make it her policy to adopt a social model of disability in framing all future and amending previous relevant legislation and guidance; and if she will make a statement. [1664]

Mr. Worthington: Our manifesto commits us to establishing "comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination in society or at work, developed in partnership with all interested parties". We shall be consulting and developing our proposals in partnership with disability organisations, employers, employers' organisations and trade unions. Interested bodies in Northern Ireland will be included in the consultation. An essential issue will be the definition of disability. It is not appropriate for me to pre-empt the outcome of that consultation.

Retail Stores

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what dates public hearings were held for the proposed retail stores at *(a)* D5 Suite Harbour Exchange, East Belfast, *(b)* Knocknagoney Site, East Belfast, *(c)* Armagh Road, Newry, *(d)* Beltrim Road, Lisburn and *(e)* Strand Road, Londonderry; and when in each case she expects decisions to be announced. [1292]

Mr. Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its Chief Executive, Mr. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. Reavie to Mr. John Taylor, dated 27 May 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked Mr. Stewart to reply to your Question about public hearings into a number of proposed retail stores and the date decisions are expected. I am replying in Mr. Stewart's absence on annual leave.

The information requested is as follows:-

Location	*Dates of public hearing*	*Current position*
D5 Site, East Belfast	3 December 1996 to 14 January 1997	Awaiting Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) Report
Knocknagoney Site, East Belfast	21 May 1996 to 18 June 1996 and 14 January 1997	Awaiting PAC Report
Armagh Road, Newry	17 June 1996 to 28 June 1996	PAC Report received. Decision expected during June 1997
Bentrim Road, Lisburn	16 September 1996 to 14 November 1996	Awaiting PAC Report
Strand Road, Londonderry	20 February 1996 to 29 March 1996 and 16 April 1996 and 8 November 1996	PAC Report received. Decision expected during June 1997

I do hope this clarifies the position.

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list *(a)* the names, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in her Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2413]

Dr. Mowlam *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Subject to the approval of the Prime Minister, I propose to appoint Mr. Nigel Warner and Ms Anna Healy as my special advisers. Mr. Warner was previously my researcher in the House of Commons and Ms Healy was the senior Parliamentary Press Officer for the Labour Party before joining the Press Office of the Leader of the Opposition before the last General Election.

The terms and conditions of the appointments are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. Special Advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

The appointments are personal to me in consultation with my Permanent Under Secretary and the Prime Minister.

Parades

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will publish a list of the meetings she has had to discuss parades in Northern Ireland,

indicating the duration of each of those meetings, with (i) concerned residents and similar groups, (ii) Right to March groups, (iii) Orange Lodges, (iv) Apprentice Boys, (v) Black institutions, (vi) Ancient Order of Hibernians, (vii) Boys' Brigade, (viii) Girls' Brigade, (ix) Boy Scouts, (x) Royal British Legion, (xi) the Chief Constable and (xii) the RUC Superintendents responsible for the possible contentious routes since she took up her present status in Northern Ireland. [2562]

Mr. Ingram: The Secretary of State has held the following meetings to discuss the parades issue in Northern Ireland:

10.30 am, 21 May 1997 Garvaghy Road Residents' Association

12.00 noon, 21 May 1997 Lower Ormeau Concerned Community

8.30 am, 21 May 1997 Dunloy Residents

Right to March groups

3.45 pm, 28 May 1997 ORDER (Ormeau Residents Demand Equal Rights)/Ulster civil rights groups

Orange Lodges

Evening of 20 May 1997 County Armagh Grand Orange Lodge

2.45 pm, 28 May 1997 Grand Orange Lodge

Apprentice Boys

12.15 pm, 28 May 1997

Royal Black Institution

5.00 pm, 3 June 1997

RUC Chief Constable

The Secretary of State has met the Chief Constable regularly to discuss a range of issues, including parades.

All of the meetings were scheduled for 45 minutes each.

Police Complaints Commission

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she will lay before Parliament the 1996 annual report of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement. [2851]

Dr. Mowlam: The 1996 Annual Report of the Independent Commission for Police Complaints is being laid before Parliament today.

The Report, which follows the format of previous years, comments on the work of the Commission in 1996. It includes an introduction from the then Chairman, James Grew, and chapters on the supervision of investigation of complaints against the police and on the Commission's role in disciplinary procedures arising from those complaints. It also has the usual statistical and financial sections.

Following 1995's reduction in the number of complaints, by 12 per cent. from the 1994 level, there was an increase of 9 per cent. in 1996. The Report states that a good deal of this increase arose from complaints made about public order policing last summer. The overall number of complaints, however, at 2,545, is similar to that seen in the early 1990s. The Commission supervised 390 cases, the highest number since its creation. The number and proportion of complaints informally resolved continue to rise, with 22.3 per cent. in 1996 compared to 18.3 per cent., 15.7 per cent. and 10 per cent. in the previous three years. The number of cases arising from the holding centres, 85, was the lowest figure since the creation of the Commission.

I should like to thank the Members and staff of the Commission for supervising a greater number of cases than ever before, and to encourage them to keep up their excellent work. In addition, I think it appropriate to record my thanks to Jim Grew for his service to the ICPC over almost a decade. His contribution has been outstanding and I am grateful to him. I wish his successor, Paul Donnelly, who has written an insert to the Report, on the way ahead on police complaints following Dr. Hayes' review of the complaints system, every success. His first challenge will be in seeing the Commission through the changes that will result from Dr. Hayes' proposals. I look forward to working in partnership with Paul Donnelly and the other bodies directly affected by the proposals in taking forward these important changes.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 10 June 1997

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the DfEE budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2113]

Dr. Howells: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply dated Friday 6 June, *Official Report*, column *310*, by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what is his Department's range of estimates of the costs of educating the extra children in the state sector who would otherwise have had an assisted place in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–00 and *(c)* 2000–01; and if he will make the relevant background papers available; [2216]

(2) what estimates his Department has made of the gross savings that will accrue in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–00 and *(c)* 2000–01 from the proposed phasing out of the assisted places scheme. [2221]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 5 June to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), *Official Report*, column *245*.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children in each age group in *(a)* Portsmouth and *(b)* Havant benefit from the assisted places scheme; and which schools they attend. [2675]

Mr. Byers: The information requested is given in the following table and relates to the current academic year 1996–97. There are no schools participating in the assisted places scheme in Havant.

Assisted places scheme: Portsmouth

	Number of assisted place holders			
	Age 5–10	*Age 11–15*	*Sixth form*	*Total*
Portsmouth Grammar School	8	142	38	188
Portsmouth High School for Girls	3	107	25	135
St. John's College, Southsea	none	156	43	199
Total	11	405	106	522

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many children from Devon are funded through the assisted places scheme; and if he will make a statement; [2497]

(2) how many of the children in Devon schools on the assisted places scheme are from the county of Devon. [2498]

Mr. Byers: Information about the local education authority area from which assisted pupils originate is not collected centrally. In the current academic year 1996–97, there are 942 assisted pupils in eight schools participating in the assisted places scheme in Devon.

Class Sizes

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish a list by local education authority of average class sizes for the primary school sector at the latest available date. [2699]

Mr. Byers: The information is shown in the following table.

Average size[1] of classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England

January 1996

	Number
City of London	26.8
Camden	27.3
Greenwich	25.5
Hackney	26.1
Hammersmith	26.1
Islington	26.2
Kensington and Chelsea	24.4
Lambeth	24.6
Lewisham	25.7
Southwark	26.2
Tower Hamlets	25.8
Wandsworth	25.4
Westminster	24.9
Barking	26.7
Barnet	26.3
Bexley	28.6
Brent	26.7
Bromley	28.7
Croydon	28.3
Ealing	27.2
Enfield	28.5
Haringey	27.0
Harrow	27.8
Havering	27.9
Hillingdon	26.6
Hounslow	27.3
Kingston upon Thames	30.0
Merton	28.1
Newham	27.9
Redbridge	29.0
Richmond upon Thames	26.7
Sutton	27.3
Waltham Forest	26.4
Birmingham	27.8
Coventry	27.2
Dudley	26.9
Sandwell	28.6
Solihull	28.2
Walshall	26.0
Wolverhampton	26.5
Knowsley	27.6
Liverpool	26.8
St. Helens	27.5

Average size[1] of classes taught by one teacher in maintained primary schools in each local education authority area in England

January 1996

	Number
Sefton	27.5
Wirral	26.4
Bolton	28.5
Bury	28.3
Manchester	27.0
Oldham	28.6
Rochdale	29.2
Salford	27.4
Stockport	27.7
Tameside	29.3
Trafford	28.7
Wigan	28.2
Barnsley	28.2
Doncaster	28.2
Rotherham	26.9
Sheffield	26.8
Bradford	27.9
Calderdale	27.7
Kirklees	28.7
Leeds	28.1
Wakefield	28.0
Gateshead	25.9
Newcastle upon Tyne	27.7
North Tyneside	27.0
South Tyneside	26.8
Sunderland	25.6
Isles of Scilly	13.7
Avon	27.7
Bedfordshire	27.1
Berkshire	27.3
Buckinghamshire	27.8
Cambridgeshire	27.8
Cheshire	27.4
Cleveland	26.9
Cornwall	27.3
Cumbria	26.0
Derbyshire	28.9
Devon	27.2
Dorset	27.7
Durham	28.4
East Sussex	27.7
Essex	26.9
Gloucestershire	27.2
Hampshire	27.8
Hereford and Worcester	25.9
Hertfordshire	26.7
Humberside	27.9
Isle of Wight	26.9
Kent	27.7
Lancashire	28.4
Leicestershire	26.7
Lincolnshire	26.7
Norfolk	26.0
North Yorkshire	26.3
Northamptonshire	26.5
Northumberland	27.1
Nottinghamshire	28.3
Oxfordshire	26.8
Shropshire	27.3
Somerset	27.3
Staffordshire	27.7
Suffolk	25.1
Surrey	25.8
Warwickshire	27.9
West Sussex	26.8
Wiltshire	27.1
England	27.3

[1] Average size of one teacher classes as taught during a single selected period on the census day.

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the average class size in each primary and secondary school, grant-maintained and local authority controlled, in the Spelthorne constituency on 31 March or the latest available date before that. [2566]

Mr. Byers: Information on class sizes for individual schools is not published centrally.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects the Form 7 figures to have been processed to provide class size information as at January 1997; and if he will make a statement. [3033]

Mr. Byers: Provisional figures on class sizes in maintained primary and secondary schools as at January 1997 are expected to be published in a Statistical Press Notice at the end of this month.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the evidence he has received which suggests that small class sizes deliver better educational standards; and if he will make a statement. [2698]

Mr. Byers: The electorate have already signalled their support for our policy to bring the educational benefits of smaller classes to all infant pupils, rather than just the few whose parents have paid for smaller classes in the independent sector. Common sense and research evidence here and notably in the United States indicate that class size is a key factor in the early years of education when pupils master the basics. Her Majesty's Chief Inspector has said in the Ofsted report on class size (1995)

"small class sizes are of benefit in the early years of primary education."

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the undertaking given by the Minister for School Standards on 22 May, *Official Report*, column *824*, that the new Education (Schools) Bill will lead to a reduction in class size for every five, six and seven-year-old in the country applies irrespective of the current size of class of which a child is a member. [2704]

Mr. Byers: Our pledge is to reduce class sizes for all five, six and seven-year-olds to 30 or below by the end of this Parliament.

Single Parents

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many extra staff will be needed in jobcentres to conduct the interviews with single parents announced by the Prime Minister on 2 June; what the gross costs of the exercise will be; and how many single parents are expected to find jobs as a result of it. [2673]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Employment Service help is already available to those lone parents who choose to use it. We will consider what additional support should in time be made available to improve the help to lone parents seeking jobs.

National Curriculum

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to reduce

the compulsory elements of the national curriculum in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools; and if he will make a statement. [3029]

Ms Estelle Morris: My right hon. Friend does not plan to make any statutory changes to key stages 1, 2 and 3 of the national curriculum before the year 2000 and is keeping the situation at key stage 4 under review.

Job Clubs

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to restore reductions in hours of operation of job clubs imposed during the current year, with particular reference the reduction applied to Frome job club. [2241]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Leigh Lewis to Mr. David Heath, dated 10 June 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question concerning the reduction in hours of Jobclubs, with particular reference to Frome Jobclub. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of the Agency.

It may help if I explain that we have needed to reduce our overall provision of Jobclubs as a result of the fall in unemployment over the past year and a consequent reduction in funding. In the South West we reduced our Jobclub network at the end of the 1996/97 operational year by 14 from 121 to 107, and a further 4 reduced their hours of operation.

A number of factors led to the decision to reduce the hours at Frome Jobclub. During the 1996/7 operational year, because of falling unemployment registers, it became clear that there were no longer sufficient numbers of unemployed people to support a Jobclub presence in Frome for four mornings a week. Between April 1996 and April 1997 registered unemployment at Frome Jobcentre fell by 30% from 1,081 to 757 with a consequential impact on our ability to fill all the places at the Jobclub.

I hope this helps to explain the background to our decision. While we have no plans at present to restore Frome JobClub's previous hours of operation, we will review the position very carefully if circumstances were to change.

I hope this is helpful.

Travellers (Education)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is his time scale for producing the planned video on education for travellers. [2760]

Ms Estelle Morris: This is one of a number of matters that are currently under consideration and I will write to the hon. Member as soon as a decision is reached.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of travellers' children currently of school age but not attending any school. [2761]

Ms Morris: Accurate data on Traveller children are difficult to collect. Through the work of the Traveller Education Services funded under section 488 of the Education Act 1996, significant progress has been made in improving school registration of traveller children. At primary level, in particular, about 80 per cent. of the total number are now registered at school, although an estimated 3–4,000 children are not. The picture at secondary level, while also improving, remains a matter of particular concern: an estimated 10,000 children are not registered at school.

School-age Children

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children who are currently of school age are not attending any school. [2762]

Ms Estelle Morris: As of January 1996, local education authorities in England were arranging education otherwise than at school for 19,133 children of compulsory school age. Included in this total were 1,011 non-statemented children in hospital and 11,055 children attending Pupil Referral Units. Data for January 1997 are not yet available. The Department does not collect information on the number of children whose parents arrange education outside of the school system, as is permitted in law: but it has been estimated that some 10,000 children are educated in this manner.

I am replying separately on the question of Traveller children not attending school.

Non-teaching Head Teachers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if non-teaching head teachers are included when calculating *(a)* class sizes and *(b)* pupil-teacher ratios. [2764]

Mr. Byers: Non-teaching head teachers are included when calculating pupil–teacher ratios but not class sizes.

Ethnic Minorities (Education)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to take forward the 10 point plan on education for the ethnic minorities. [2759]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are currently considering ways of raising the achievement of ethnic minority pupils, and among these the future of the previous Government's 10 point action plan. We hope to make an announcement shortly.

Pupil-teacher Ratio

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has for changes to the way in which pupil-teacher ratio and class sizes are calculated. [2763]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) on 5 June, *Official Report*, column *244*.

Disabled People (Civil Rights)

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he plans to take to implement full, enforceable civil rights for disabled people. [2502]

Mr. Alan Howarth: Our manifesto commits us to establishing "comprehensive, enforceable civil rights" for disabled people. We are consulting interested parties on the best way to achieve this and we shall develop proposals in the light of our discussions.

Further Education

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the revised figures for the number of students in the further education sector as a result of the recent agreement between his Department and the Further Education Funding Council will be the baseline for the next PES round. [2871]

Dr. Howells: The student numbers implied by the Further Education Funding Council for England's allocations to colleges for the academic year 1997–98 will be taken into account in future decisions about public expenditure.

Political and Special Advisers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2420]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* I have, with the approval of the Prime Minister, appointed two Special Advisers; Conor Ryan and Sophie Linden, who works part-time.

I have, in addition, appointed Professor Michael Barber as an expert adviser on Standards and Effectiveness.

The terms and conditions of these appointments are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special Advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned. I have already announced that I will provide information on the total costs to the Department of a number of appointments as soon as agreement has been reached.

These are personal appointments by myself, following consultation with the Permanent Head of the Department and the Prime Minister.

DEFENCE

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what share of the costs of the CBDE Porton Down are devoted to research and programmes related to the detection of contraventions of chemical and biological weapons treaties and conventions, and the creation of verification systems; which agencies and departments have commissioned such research and programmes; and what plans he has to review this matter. [1338]

Mr. Spellar: Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) operates as a Trading Fund and all work carried out by the CBD Sector at Porton Down is commissioned and paid for by customers. Income for the 1996–97 financial year relating to the detection of contraventions of chemical and biological weapons treaties and conventions, and the creation of a verification system was:

Customer	*Amount £000*	*Percentage of total income 1996–97*
MOD	1,982	4.5
FCO	100	0.3
DTI	150	0.3
OPCW[1] Inspector Training		
FCO	17	0.04
Other Governments	43.5	0.1
	2,292.5	5.24

[1] Organisation for the Production of Chemical Weapons.

MOD provides advice and research and development work on a range of Chemical and Biological arms control and export control matters. Other Government departments provide support to UN Special Commission, tutors for an OPCW inspectors training course and technical support to the DTI which is the UK National Authority for Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Plans for expenditure in this area are regularly reviewed by Departments during their annual costing cycles. The MOD's expenditure will also be reviewed as part of the Strategic Defence Review announced by the Secretary of State for Defence on 28 May.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to decontaminate each of the sites *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad where the British Armed Forces have (i) tested and (ii) stored chemical weapons or chemical agents used in chemical weapons; when he expects this work to be completed; and what estimate he has made of the cost to date of those measures. [2438]

Mr. Spellar: Within the United Kingdom, former chemical warfare (CW) sites were decontaminated in accordance with the guidance prevalent at the time my Department vacated the site. Those sites which continue to form part of the Defence Estate are being assessed as part of the Department's Land Quality Assessment programme. This programme is designed to establish the condition of individual sites on the Defence Estate and, where appropriate, make recommendations for remediation. Given the extent of the Defence Estate I am not able to estimate when this work will be completed. As to the costs involved, no central records are maintained. Indeed, as remediation work on former CW sites has been spread over some 50 years it is not possible to quantify the costs involved.

Mr. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the sites abroad where the United Kingdom has conducted trials or tests of chemical weapons or their components in the last 30 years, indicating the types and quantities of chemical agents used in each case. [2437]

Dr. John Reid: The United Kingdom relinquished its offensive chemical weapons programme in the late 1950s. Since then, no trials of chemical weapons or their components have been carried out, either in the UK or overseas.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research has been commissioned, what estimates have been made by his Department and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the total defence budget of the introduction of *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2105]

Dr. John Reid: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade (Mrs. Beckett) on 9 June (*Official Report*, Col. *310*).

British Army of the Rhine

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the defence budget was spent on updating the equipment of the British Army of the Rhine over the last three years. [2392]

Mr. Spellar: Information about expenditure on defence equipment is collated on the basis of generic categories rather than the user Service or formation. Expenditure on the development and production of Land systems has represented 6 per cent. of the Defence budget in each of the last three years.

Note:

1. This figure includes expenditure on Land systems for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, and excludes expenditure on Sea and Air systems for the Army.

2. The figure is based on cash outturn costs; for 1995–96 and 1996–97 these are estimates.

3. The British Army of the Rhine ceased to exist as a formation from 1 April 1994 when 1 (UK) Armoured Division and the United Kingdom Support Command (Germany) became fully operational under Headquarters Land Command.

Defence Expenditure

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* percentage of public expenditure and *(b)* proportion of Gross National Product each member country of NATO spent on defence in the last five years. [2391]

Dr. John Reid: My Department does not routinely collect information on defence expenditure by our NATO allies as a proportion of total public expenditure.

The percentage of Gross Domestic Product spent on defence by each NATO member in each of the last five years is given below.

Per cent.

Country	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Greece	5.5	5.4	5.6	4.6	4.6
Turkey	3.9	4.1	4.1	3.9	4.4
United States	5.2	4.7	4.2	3.9	3.7
United Kingdom	3.9	3.6	3.4	3.1	3.0
France	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.1	3.0
Portugal	2.9	2.9	3.0	2.7	2.7
Norway	3.4	3.2	3.2	2.9	2.5
Netherlands	2.5	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.0
Italy	2.0	2.1	2.1	1.9	2.0
Denmark	1.9	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.8
Germany	2.2	2.0	1.8	1.7	1.7
Belgium	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.6
Canada	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.5
Spain	1.7	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.5
Luxembourg	1.2	1.2	1.1	0.9	0.8

Iceland, although a member of NATO, has no armed forces.

RAF Wroughton

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidelines have been laid down for the present and future usage of the RAF Wroughton site, including the former Princess Alexandra Hospital; and what is the total income that has been generated by leasing out the site and its facilities since the closure of the hospital; and from whom. [2306]

Mr. Spellar: Fifty-six airmen's quarters at RAF Wroughton have been leased for a period of three years to three housing associations, pending their re-use by the armed forces. I am withholding information on the level of rent being paid for reasons of commercial confidentiality under exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. No other facilities have been leased out since the site closed. The former Princess Alexander Hospital is in disposal, and guidelines for its future use are therefore a matter for the local planning authority. In the meantime, all relevant health and safety guidelines are being followed.

Plastic Baton Rounds

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about plastic baton rounds. [3191]

Mr. Spellar: I understand that tests have shown that a significant proportion of a batch of plastic baton rounds, approved for use in public order situations by the Armed Forces, by police forces in England and Wales and by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, have muzzle velocities slightly in excess of the upper limit in the equipment specification. These rounds, which were on issue from early 1994, were withdrawn from all operational use in April this year. Replacement stocks, which do not exceed the specified velocity, have been issued.

Plastic baton rounds and the procedures governing their use will be kept under continuous review. In addition, procedures are being put in place to ensure that stocks in operational use are tested regularly to ensure that they continue to conform to specification. A programme has been put in hand to take advantage of emerging technologies, with the aim of developing improved baton round equipment to meet operational needs but with reduced injury potential. We will continue to look at other effective means for controlling public disorder and riot situations.

Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the United Kingdom's contribution to the costs of the preparatory commission for the international organization established under the Comprehensive Test Ban treaty, expressing the figures *(a)* for each relevant

Government financial year and *(b)* for each financial year of the commission; and from which subheads of which votes these funds are taken. [2551]

Dr. John Reid: The Government is fully committed to the strong verification regime of monitoring and on-site inspection which is so essential to the successful implementation of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The Budget of the Preparatory Commission of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation is determined annually. That for 1997 was finalised last March and amounted to some $US28, of which the United Kingdom contribution, based upon the United Nations scale of charges, is 6 per cent. So far the United kingdom has paid some $US213,00, and the balance will be paid later this year.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing Countries (Debts)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what criteria will be used to determine which developing countries are given priority in respect of reducing their debts to the United Kingdom. [2669]

Clare Short: We will give priority to those countries which are eligible for concessional Paris Club relief. These are low income countries whose debt burden is unsustainable, and which are undertaking economic reform programmes agreed with the IMF. Our aim is that debt relief should be part of a wider commitment by debtors to economic reform, to ensure that the relief encourages economic development and leads to lasting poverty reduction.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how she intends to reduce the debt owed to Britain from developing countries in the next year. [2666]

Clare Short: The United Kingdom will play a full part in rescheduling negotiations at the Paris Club of Official Creditors, and will push for swift and comprehensive implementation of the recently agreed Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the estimated debt to Britain from developing countries. [2665]

Clare Short: In November 1996 (the latest date for which figures are currently available) the total outstanding rescheduled debt owed to the Export Credits Guarantee Department by countries defined by the World Bank as developing countries (lower and middle income countries) and which have had a Paris Club debt rescheduling was £7,434.58 million.

At the end of March 1997 the total value of development loans owed to the Overseas Development Administration was £239 million.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has and over what time scale to cancel the debt owed to Britain by developing countries. [2667]

Clare Short: The United Kingdom has already forgiven aid loans worth £1.2 billion. We are willing to consider similar relief on aid debts for the remaining low income debtors which cannot service their debt and have demonstrated their ability to use debt relief to promote economic development and reduce poverty.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what research her Department has evaluated on measures taken or evaluated by other countries to reduce the debts owed by developing countries. [2668]

Clare Short: We have studied with interest assessments from a number of sources, including non-governmental organisations, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, the international financial institutions and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Costa Rica

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the total sum now owed by the Government of Costa Rica to Her Majesty's Government under the terms of the loan agreement dated 15 February 1973, as amended; how much of this is *(a)* principal and *(b)* interest; and what future interest charges are expected. [2548]

Clare Short: Under the present schedule of repayments the total sum due to be repaid by the Government of Costa Rica to Her Majesty's Government under the terms of the loan agreement dated 15 February 1973, as amended is £1,237,845.85; of this £1,121,191.31 is principal and £116,654.54 is interest. Future interest charges are at the rate of 3 per cent. per annum.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was the total sum lent to the Government of Costa Rica by Her Majesty's Government under the terms of the loan agreement dated 15 February 1973, as amended. [2546]

Clare Short: The sum lent to the Government of Costa Rica by Her Majesty's Government under the terms of the loan agreement dated 15 February 1973, as amended is £3,880,441.25. Since that date repayments under this loan have been rescheduled on nine occasions and arrears of interest have been consolidated into the original loan.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what further discussions there have been between the Government of Costa Rica and Her Majesty's Government with regard to the loan agreement dated 15 February 1973, as amended, since the debt rescheduling agreement of 18 November 1993. [2542]

Clare Short: There have been no discussions of the agreement since the 18 November 1993 rescheduling. We have drawn the attention of the Costa Rican authorities to arrears whenever they have arisen, which has resulted in their being cleared.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the total sum paid by the Government of Costa Rica to Her Majesty's Government under the terms of the loan agreement dated 15 February 1973, as amended; and how much of this is *(a)* principal and *(b)* interest. [2547]

Clare Short: The total sum paid to date by the Government of Costa Rica to Her Majesty's Government under the terms of the loan agreement dated 15 February 1973, as amended £7,105,106.87; of this £4,828,039.28 is principal and £2,277,067.59 is interest.

Jammu and Kashmir

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the current provision of aid to Jammu and Kashmir. [2730]

Clare Short: DFID contributed £17 million from Aid and Trade Provision funds to a 480MW hydroelectric power station at Uri, which has just been completed. Since 1995 DFID has also contributed £450,000 in support of the International Committee of the Red Cross programme in Jammu and Kashmir, including a new contribution of £150,000 in March 1997.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the current provision of aid to Sierra Leone. [2729]

Clare Short: Following the military coup on 25 May, we have suspended our bilateral aid programme pending developments.

DFID had been working closely with the democratically elected government to rebuild the country and reduce poverty.

UN Poverty Conference

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in implementing the conclusions of the UN Copenhagen Conference on International Poverty; and if she will make a statement. [1193]

Clare Short: This Government is committed to working for a safer, more decent and environmentally stable world. The elimination of poverty is at the centre of our agenda. I am currently reviewing all our programmes to ensure that resources are targeted accordingly. A White Paper will be issued in the Autumn setting out how, through more coherent policies, the Government will tackle global poverty and promote sustainable development. This strategy will embrace the commitments agreed at the Copenhagen Summit.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

National Lottery

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proportion of national lottery proceeds have been directed to the Northern region. [2147]

Mr. Banks: Regions in the North of England have received £754,542,879 from the Lottery representing a share of 21 per cent. of all Lottery money distributed to date. The details are set out in the following table.

Region	*Total* £	*Total per cent.*[1]
North West	326,412,694	9
North East	143,883,667	4
Yorkshire and Humberside	210,442,746	6
Merseyside	73,803,772	2
Total	754,542,879	21

[1] Rounded to the nearest per cent.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Defendants (Prosecution Costs)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total sum ordered to be paid by defendants in criminal cases in relation to the prosecution cost; and what was the total sum recovered in each of the last three years. [2955]

The Attorney-General: Information on the amounts ordered to be paid by defendants in relation to prosecution costs is not available centrally within the Crown Prosecution Service and could be collected only at disproportionate cost. The sums recovered from defendants in the last three years in relation to the CPS are as follows:

	Amount recovered £ *million*
1994–95	19.3
1995–96	20.5
1996–97	21.4

The number of cases handled by the Serious Fraud Office is sufficiently small for such awards to be centrally available. Orders for the payment of prosecution costs are passed to the appropriate magistrates court which is responsible for enforcing the order and collecting payments. The amounts awarded and recovered in the last three financial years in relation to awards in favour of the SFO are:

	Awarded £	*Recovered* £
1994–95	60,000	154,621.50
1995–96	191,667	24,756.00
1996–97	6,000	[1]172,554.66

[1] Unaudited figure. Please note that recovery of amounts of costs awarded do not always fall in the same financial year.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Magistrates and Justices of the Peace

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what studies he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated to indicate the relative case disposal rate of stipendiary magistrates and justices of the peace. [2947]

Mr. Hoon: In 1994, the Lord Chancellor established a working party to identify more clearly the respective roles of the stipendiary magistracy and the lay bench in the administration of justice in the magistrates' courts. The working party commissioned research from the University of Leeds on the role and appointment of stipendiary magistrates. A copy of the working party's report (published in February 1996) is available in both libraries.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many appeals against (i) conviction and (ii) sentence were successfully made from decisions of justices of the peace; and how many appeals against (1) convictions and (2) sentence were successfully made from decisions of stipendiary

and metropolitan stipendiary magistrates in each of the last three years. [2938]

Mr. Hoon: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from M. D. Huebner to Mr. Humfrey Malins, dated 9 June 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about how many appeals against convictions and sentence were successfully made from decisions of justices of the peace, stipendiary and metropolitan stipendiary magistrates in each of the last three years.

The information requested is not held centrally and can only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, I set out below information on the total number of appeals made from magistrates' courts which may be of interest to you.

Appeals	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Varied* [1]	*Remitted to mag crt* [2]	*Abandoned in court* [3]	*Abandoned before court* [4]	*Other result*	*Total*
1996–97	4,312	6,198	3,259	39	1,057	3,002	166	18,033
1995–96	7,839	8,181	4,283	44	1,182	3,901	312	25,742
1994–95	8,116	7,957	4,003	42	1,132	3,901	369	25,520

[1] Appeals where sentence has been reduced.
[2] Appeals sent back to magistrates' court for consideration.
[3] Appeals which have been abandoned at a hearing.
[4] Appeals which have been abandoned before a hearing.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to increase *(a)* the number of metropolitan stipendiary magistrates and *(b)* the number of stipendiary magistrates. [2949]

Mr. Hoon: Stipendiary magistrates are appointed by the Lord Chancellor at the request of the relevant Lord Chancellor's Advisory Committee in order to assist the efficient disposal of cases in magistrates' courts. Under the Justices of the Peace Act 1997 the statutory ceilings on the number of stipendiary appointments are: 60 metropolitan stipendiary magistrates; and 50 provincial stipendiary magistrates. There are no current plans to raise either ceiling. Appointments to two recently established provincial stipendiary magistrate posts in Derbyshire will be announced shortly.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many justices of the peace there are in England and Wales. [2951]

Mr. Hoon: As at 1 January 1997 there were 30,374 active justices of the peace in England and Wales, 15,858 men and 14,516 women.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases were disposed of by justices of the peace in 1996. [2953]

Mr. Hoon: Magistrates throughout England and Wales dealt with 2,321,475 defendants in completed criminal cases and 531,181 applications in completed family and civil cases during 1996. The Lord Chancellor's Department does not collect a breakdown of which cases were heard by justices of the peace or by stipendiary magistrates.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to change the *(a)* title and *(b)* working conditions of stipendiary magistrates. [2954]

Mr. Hoon: A consultation paper on the titles of stipendiary magistrates was issued in 1992. The responses revealed there to be insufficient consensus on which alternative title might be adopted for stipendiary magistrates. There are no plans to change working conditions of stipendiary magistrates.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to give *(a)* stipendiary and *(b)* metropolitan stipendiary magistrates sentencing or other powers greater than those exercised by justices of the peace. [2940]

Mr. Hoon: There are currently no plans to alter sentencing or other powers of stipendiary or metropolitan stipendiary magistrates. However, this Government's commitment to a review of Youth Justice might identify the need to consider this issue further.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what has been the average cost to the Exchequer of *(a)* a stipendiary magistrate and *(b)* a justice of the peace, in each of the last three years. [2948]

Mr. Hoon: The average cost to the Consolidated Fund of a stipendiary magistrate for the last three years was:

1994–95: £60,939
1995–96: £67,340
1996–97: £70,072

The average cost of financial loss, travelling and subsistence allowances and training of a justice of the peace for the three most recent financial years for which such information is available was:

1993–94: £418
1994–95: £471
1995–96: £452

Expenditure figures for 1996–97 are not yet available.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many metropolitan stipendiary magistrates and stipendiary magistrates there are in England and Wales. [2950]

Mr. Hoon: There are 50 metropolitan stipendiary magistrates and 40 provincial stipendiary magistrates in post.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many cases were disposed of by metropolitan stipendiary magistrates and stipendiary magistrates in 1996. [2952]

Mr. Hoon: Magistrates throughout England and Wales dealt with 2,321,475 defendants in completed criminal cases and 531,181 applications in completed family and

civil cases during 1996. The Lord Chancellor's Department does not collect a breakdown of which cases were heard by justices of the peace or by stipendiary magistrates.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the total sum ordered to be paid by legally aided defendants in all criminal proceedings by way of contribution to legal aid; and what was the total sum so paid in each of the last three years. [2956]

Mr. Hoon: Information on the amount of contribution ordered to be paid by legally aided defendants in criminal proceedings is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The total amount of contributions received, net of any repayments to defendants, in each of the last three years for which information is available, was as follows:

£ million

	1993–94	*1994–95*	*1995–96*
Criminal magistrates' court	2.3	2.7	2.7
Higher criminal courts	1.6	1.6	1.6
Total contributions received	3.9	4.3	4.3

Following an acquittal an assisted person may be reimbursed the full cost of contributions that have been paid. However, information on the amount of contributions repaid is not available.

SCOTLAND

Maternity Unit (Glasgow)

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans there are for financing the proposed new maternity unit at Glasgow Royal Infirmary which will serve the Shettleston constituency; and if he will make a statement. [2215]

Mr. Galbraith: The proposed new maternity unit at Glasgow Royal Infirmary is part of a package of private finance initiative projects which I am reviewing at present.

Scottish Screen

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which body will be charged with responsibility for the cultural and educational aspects of film and video. [2285]

Mr. Galbraith: Scottish Screen took over the responsibilities of the Scottish Film Council on 1 April 1997.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what local authority representation there is on the current Scottish Screen Board. [2196]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* At present there is no local authority representation on the board of Scottish Screen. This is an omission which I look forward to rectifying at the earliest opportunity.

Ms Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current staffing of Scottish Screen; and if he will list the job titles of those staff. [2198]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Thirty six people are employed. Under the Chief Executive there are eight departments: Production; Development; Archive; Locations; Marketing, Information & Business Development; Europe (Media Antenna): Training; and Central Services.
The job titles are:

Chief Executive's Office: Chief Executive, Personal Assistant;

Production: Production Business Executive, Projects Producer, Production Assistant, Information Officer;

Development: Development Producer, Development Assistant;

Archive: Development Producer, Development Assistant;

Archive; Archive Curator, Production Library Administrator, Librarian, Assistant Librarian (Cataloguing), Gaelic Television Officer, Preservation and Technical Executive Officer, Access Technician;

Locations: Locations Director, Locations Co-ordinator, Locations Assistant;

Marketing, Information, Business & Development: Exhibition Officer, Marketing Officer, Marketing Assistant, Information Officer;

MEDIA Antenna (Europe): MEDIA Antenna Officer, MEDIA Antenna Assistant;

Training: Training Director, Projects Producer, Training Co-ordinator, Projects Producer, Clerical Assistant;

Central Services: Accountant, Accounting Assistant, Accounting Clerk, Office Manager, Office Assistant, Senior Development Officer, Administration Officer.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his plans for compulsory competitive tendering. [2286]

Mr. Chisholm: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) on 2 June, *Official Report*, columns *67–68*.

HIV/AIDS

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what plans he has to provide additional resources for HIV/AIDS therapy in Scotland in light of the increased availability of more effective HIV/AIDS drug treatments; and if he will make a statement; [2433]

(2) what steps he will take to ensure that there is sufficient funding for HIV/AIDS clinics in Scotland to meet the anticipated increased demand for their services; and if he will make a statement; [2434]

(3) what steps he will take to ensure full availability of combination therapies, counselling services, dietetic treatments, in-patient services, psychiatric support in the community and district nurse services and other necessary services for HIV/AIDS patients; and if he will make a statement. [2435]

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide additional funds for the provision of the new combination therapies for HIV/AIDS patients. [2289]

Mr. Galbraith: It is for health boards to consider the treatment and care to be provided to HIV/AIDS patients in their areas in the light of local needs and of the total resources available to them. The implications of the new combination therapies will be among the factors they consider.

In the current year, health boards in Scotland have been given, within their general allocations, funds totalling £9.6 million to respond to the treatment and care needs of persons with HIV/AIDS. In addition, boards are receiving some £6.4 million to engage in prevention activities.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will remove the capital restrictions imposed on the current year's Scottish Homes budget. [2473]

Mr. Chisholm: The Government is committed to working within current expenditure plans. Under these, Scottish Homes is required to use its capital receipts to repay debt. To remove this requirement would mean having to find offsetting savings from other Scottish Office programmes. We are, of course, continuing to review spending priorities generally across the Scottish Office.

Manning Appeals

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to synchronise the rights of objectors to appeal with the existing rights available to developers. [1970]

Mr. Chisholm *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* The Scottish Office has no plans to extend to objectors the existing rights of applicants to appeal against the refusal of planning permission. Objectors already have a voice and can make representations to the planning authority before a planning application is decided. In particular, they have the opportunity to submit views to their community councils (which are now statutory consultees for all planning applications) and the Council. Councils are required to take these views fully into account when deciding applications.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Special Advisers

Ms McDonagh: To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to her oral answer to the right hon. Members for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) and for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) of 5 June, *Official Report*, columns 549–50, if she will make a further statement on the arrangements for the positive vetting of special advisers. [3053]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Special advisers are vetted as appropriate to the sensitivity of material they see. In the Prime Minister's Office, Mr. Jonathan Powell may from time to time need to have access to sensitive intelligence material. He has previously been positively vetted and his vetting is now being renewed. Some other special advisers in No. 10 are, as a matter of routine, being positively vetted though it is unlikely that they will have access to sensitive intelligence material.

European Affairs Committees

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the President of the Council when she expects to move to re-establish the Select Committee on European Legislation and European Standing Committees A and B; and if she will make a statement on her proposals for their responsibilities in the forthcoming parliamentary session. [2567]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: I hope that the Committees will be re-established soon. They will continue to operate under their current Standing Orders pending the House's approval of any recommendations for change following the review of the process for scrutinising European legislation, which the Government is committed to undertaking.

Constitutional Bills

Mr. Howard: To ask the President of the Council on which previous occasion or occasions a Bill of constitutional significance has been made subject to a timetable motion before the commencement of the Committee stage. [2153]

Mrs. Ann Taylor *[pursuant to her answer, 9 June 1997, c. 318]:* The Scotland Bill and the Wales Bill were the subject of Allocation of Time Orders made on 16 November 1977, having been given a Second Reading on 14 and 15 November respectively.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the total Home Department budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* 4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2110]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 9 June, *Official Report*, column *310*.

London Fire and Civil Defence Authority

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to assist the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority with the growth in its pension liabilities; and if he will make a statement. [2366]

Mr. George Howarth: Fire authorities generally are faced with the cost of meeting increasing pensions commitments from their revenue budgets. The Government will take this into account in reaching its decisions on future local government settlements. My right hon. Friend will also be giving early consideration to taking forward the review that has been undertaken of the fireman's pension scheme.

Animal Experimentation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what research he has commissioned into the overbreeding of small animals in London medical schools; and if he will make a statement; [2386]

(2) what assessment he has made of the findings of the report, "Access Denied", by the national Anti-Vivisection Society, a copy of which has been sent to him. [2388]

Mr. George Howarth: The allegations made by the National Anti-Vivisection Society in their report "Access Denied", including those of overbreeding of laboratory animals, were investigated by a senior member of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate. A letter outlining the findings of this investigation was sent to the Director of the National Anti-Vivisection Society in July 1996.

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 anticipates the overbreeding of animals and specifically provides for their humane killing. Overbreeding is inevitable and arises from difficulty in predicting when and how many animals will be needed in the face of varying demands specifying age, sex, weight and strain, for example.

Mr. Hanclock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to allow public scrutiny of project licence applications for animal experimentation. [2387]

Mr. Howarth: Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 prohibits the disclosure of such information.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the members of the Animal Procedures Committee; when the terms of office of the members come to an end; and what plans he has to increase public openness of the appointments procedure. [2385]

Mr. Howarth: The members of the Committee are as follows:

	Appointed
Professor Margaret Brazier (Appointed as Chairman in October 1993)	July 1990
Professor Ronald Anderson	December 1994
Professor Margaret Boden	December 1994
Professor Barry Bridges	January 1990
Professor Fiona Broughton Pipkin	January 1990
Dr. David Christopher	December 1994
Dr. Yvonne Cripps	December 1994
Professor Robin Dunbar	January 1997
Professor Paul Flecknell	December 1994
Mr. John Gregory	January 1997
Professor Susan Iversen	January 1990
Mrs. Judy MacArthur Clark	December 1994
Miss Cindy Milburn	April 1995
Dr. Ian Purchase	December 1994
Dr. Jacqueline Southee	April 1995
Professor Michael Spyer	January 1990
Dr. Anthony Suckling	January 1992
Professor John Turner	January 1997
Mr. Les Ward	April 1995

A list of members is published each year in the Committee's annual report.

Members of the Committee are appointed for a term not exceeding four years. No member may be appointed for more than two terms. Appointments are always announced.

Consideration is currently being given to changes in the appointment process in the light of the recommendations made by the Nolan Committee.

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what measures will be taken to promote and enforce the principles of reduction, refinement and replacement in respect of animal experiments; [3004]

(2) how the Government intends to promote and facilitate the investigation of viable alternatives to the use of animals in experiments. [3006]

Mr. Howarth: Under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, no programme of work can be authorised unless consideration has been given to alternatives; these include reduction, refinement and replacement. In assessing project licence applications, the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate ensures that such consideration has been given.

The Government makes funds available to the Animals Procedures Committee to sponsor research into and other work concerned with alternatives.

The Government fully supports the work of the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government will be pressing for immediate implementation of the ban on cosmetics testing on animals agreed by the EU Commission in 1993. [2879]

Mr. Howarth: The 6th Council amendment to the European Cosmetics Directive sought in 1993 to ban the marketing of cosmetic products containing ingredients, or combinations of ingredients, tested on animals after January 1998, but only if validated alternative tests, which offer an equivalent level of protection for the consumer, are in place.

Despite intense and continuing research efforts, mainly by the cosmetics industry itself, validated alternatives are not available for all tests and the European Union has had to postpone the deadline until June 2000.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make the technical details of applications for licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and information regarding breaches of the regulations of this Act more easily available and accessible to the public. [2881]

Mr. Howarth: Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 prohibits the disclosure of such information.

General information on infringements of the Act is published each year in the annual report of the Animal Procedures Committee.

Dr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government have to establish a Royal Commission inquiry into animal experiments; and what is the proposed time scale. [3003]

Mr. Howarth: We have no such plans at this time.

CS Gas Spray

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the use of CS gas spray by the police. [2267]

Mr. Michael: The Decision to issue CS spray equipment is for chief constables while the decision to use CS spray, once issued, rests with individual officers, who must comply with the law in relation to the use of any force.

In April 1995, the Association of Chief Police Officers agreed that selected forces should conduct street trials of CS spray. This followed a long period of consideration of possible police use of incapacitant sprays. Expert assessment of all available scientific data concluded that not enough was know about the health effects of pepper spray but that CS, which had been tested to a level similar to that required for a new pharmaceutical drug, did not present any significant threat to health. Trials took place in 16 forces between 1 March and 31 August 1996. Officers felt that the new equipment had brought about a marked reduction in assaults, although assaults data gave a mixed picture on this. The trials confirmed the safety of CS. Seventeen forces, including the Metropolitan Police, currently have CS sprays. Guidance on the use of CS is an operational matter for chief officers. The Association of Chief Police Officers have produced guidelines, copies of which have been in the Library since April 1996.

European Convention on Human Rights

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the advantages and disadvantages of introducing into British law the European convention on human rights. [1197]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The speech of my right hon. Friend on the Debate on the Address on 19 May, *Official Report,* column 395, set out the case, in the Government's view, for incorporating the Convention. It will be for others to point out what they see as the disadvantages.

I will send the hon. Gentleman a document, "Bringing Rights Home", published by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and my hon. Friend the Member for Brent South (Mr. Boateng) in December, setting out the case in more detail.

Deportation

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many children were served with notices of intention to deport in 1995, 1996 and 1997 to date; [2467]

(2) how many children were deported in 1995, 1996 and 1997 to date. [2466]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The answer to the question is given in the table.

Children subject to deportation action under section 3(5)(c) of the Immigration Act

	1995	*1996*	*January to May 1997*[1]
Served with a notice of intention to deport	146	533	202
Removed under the deportation process[2]	3	10	2

[1] Provisional data.
[2] Including voluntary departures after deportation action had been initiated.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were detained in Birmingham prison under Immigration Act powers during 1996; how many of those detained were deported; and what were their nationalities. [2469]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Provisional information for 1996 is contained in the tables.

Persons detained in Birmingham prison under Immigration Act powers, numbers in custody at the end of each month, 1996, by nationality:

	Total number in custody at the end of the month	*Nationalities*
January	51	Algerian (2), Bangladeshi (2), Chinese (5), Indian (27), Nigerian (4), Pakistani (6), Others (5)
February	55	Algerian (6), Chinese (3), Indian (25), Nigerian (5), Pakistani (9), Others (7)
March	63	Algerian (8), Chinese (2), Indian (30), Nigerian (4), Pakistani (6), South African (2), Others (11)
April	48	Algerian (8), Bangladeshi (2), Indian (27), Nigerian (2), Pakistani (2), South African (2), Others (5)
May	51	Algerian (9), Bangladeshi (3), Indian (23), Nigerian (5), Pakistani (3), Others (8)
June	50	Algerian (7), Chinese (2), Indian (29), Nigerian (4), Others (8)
July	39	Algerian (3), Chinese (2), Indian (20), Jamaican (3), Nigerian (3), Pakistani (2), Others (6)
August	28	Algerian (4), Indian (12), Nigerian (2), Pakistani (3), Others (7)
September	26	Algerian (3), Indian (11), Nigerian (4), Pakistani (3), Others (5)
October	19	Algerian (2), Indian (11), Nigerian (2), Others (4)
November	20	Algerian (5), Indian (7), Jamaican (3), Pakistani (2), Others (3)
December	18	Algerian (7), Indian (4), Jamaican (2), Nigerian (2), Turkish (2), Others (1)

Persons recorded as discharged from Birmingham prison for removal by the Immigration Service in 1996, by nationality:

	Total number deported during the month	Nationalities
January	23	Bangladeshi (3), Indian (16), Others (4)
February	22	China (2), Indian (11), Jamaica (2), Pakistani (2), Others (5)
March	20	Indian (8), Nigerian (2), Pakistani (5), Others (5)
April	17	Indian (8), Pakistani (3), Others (6)
May	10	Algerian (2), Indian (6), Pakistani (2)
June	11	Indian (4), Pakistani (2), Others (5)
July	21	Algerian (2), Indian (16), Jamaican (2), Others (1)
August	15	Hong Kong (2), Indian (8), Jamaican (2), Others (3)
September	12	Indian (4), Morocco (2), Others (6)
October	5	Indian (3), Others (2)
November	12	Indian (6), Others (6)
December	4	Indian (2), Jamaican (2)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those people detained in Birmingham prison under Immigration Act powers were deported during the months of January, February, March and April; and what were the nationalities of those deported. [2468]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Provisional information for January to April 1997 is contained in the table.

Persons recorded as being discharged for removal by the immigration service in January to April 1997, who had been detained in Birmingham prison

	Total number discharged during the month	Nationality
January	5	Indian (2), Others (3)
February	5	Indian (3), Others (2)
March	3	Others (3)
April	1	Others (1)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people who had applied at some stage for asylum, were deported from Birmingham prison during January, February, March and April; and what were the nationalities of those deported; [2464]

(2) how many people who had applied at some stage for asylum were detained in Birmingham prison during January, February, March and April; and what were the nationalities of those detained. [2465]

Mr. O'Brien: The available information on asylum seekers detained in Her Majesty's Prison Birmingham is given in the table.

There were no failed asylum seekers recorded as being deported from Her Majesty's Prison Birmingham during each of the months January to April 1997. This does no include asylum seekers removed as illegal entrants or under port refusal procedures.

Table 1: Number of people recorded [1,2] as being detained [3] at Her Majesty's prison Birmingham who had sought asylum at some stage, by nationality of detainee, as at selected dates in 1997.

Nationality	As at 31 January [4] 1997	As at 27 March 1997	As at 30 April 1997
Algeria	6	6	3
India	5	4	2
Other [5]	5	5	5
Total	16	15	10

[1] Provisional figures.
[2] Source: ISED and ISPD computer systems.
[3] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971. In some cases the asylum application will have been lodged subsequent to the applicant being detained. The figures include both detained asylum applicants who applied at ports, and those detained in after-entry enforcement work and include those awaiting removal following refusal of asylum, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal.
[4] Illegal entrants and those subject to deportation action are as at 31 January and Port cases are as at 3 February.
[5] The "Other" category may include nationalities already listed.

Immigration Detainees

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were detained in Birmingham prison under Immigration Act powers in January, February, March and April; and what were the nationalities of those detained. [2470]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is contained in the table.

Persons detained in Birmingham prison under Immigration Act powers, in custody at the end of each month, January to April 1997, by nationality

	Total number in custody at the end of the month	Nationality
January	16	Algerian (5), Indian (5), Nigerian (2), Turkish (2), Other (2)
February	12	Algerian (7), Nigerian (2), Turkish (2), Other (1)
March	11	Algerian (6), Turkish (2), Other (3)
April	11	Algerian (4), Jamaican (3), Other (4)

WPC Yvonne Fletcher

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate the allegations contained in a television programme in respect of the late Police Constable, Yvonne Fletcher, a copy of which has been sent to him. [2958]

Mr. Straw: Despite extensive police investigation, nobody has been prosecuted for the brutal murder of WPC Fletcher. The case remains open and the Metropolitan Police will consider any new evidence put to them. They are reviewing the contents of the programme.

Shooting Incident (St. James's Square)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information British intelligence

services received prior to the shooting in St James's Square on 17 April about the prospect of a shooting in the square. [2957]

Mr. Straw: It is not Government practice to comment on speculation about the activities of the intelligence services.

First-time Offenders

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate how many of those persons convicted of a serious criminal offence in 1996 were first-time offenders. [2941]

Mr. Michael: There is no universal or simple definition of the term "serious offence, but information routinely available centrally for England and Wales relates to convictions for a "standard list" of fence. These offences are listed in appendices 4 and 5 of "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, 1995" (Cm. 3421). They include all indictable and some of the more serious summary offences."

The latest figures available on this basis relate to 1994, when it is estimated that, of the 357,000 persons sentenced for standard list offences, 199,000 had no previous convictions for such offences.

Figures for 1995 should be available later this year.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people sought asylum in the United Kingdom; how many were refused; and of those refused, how many were removed from the United Kingdom in each of the last four years. [2943]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Information regarding asylum applications submitted in the United Kingdom, and on initial decisions on applications, for each of the years 1993 to 1996, is given in table 1.1 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom, 1996", issue 15/97. Information on removals and voluntary departures of asylum applicants during this period is given in table 10.1 of the same publication, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many persons who sought asylum in the United Kingdom in the last three years but were refused, are still in the United Kingdom; and of such persons how many are at addresses known to his Department; [2942]

(2) what proportion of those persons who sought asylum in the United Kingdom in *(a)* 1994, *(b)* 1995 and *(c)* 1996 and who are still in the United Kingdom are at addresses known to his Department. [2944]

Mr. O'Brien: The requested information is not available.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to announce an amnesty for those in the United Kingdom illegally. [2946]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government have no plans to introduce such an amnesty.

Immigration Advisers

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a registration scheme for immigration advisers; and if he will make a statement. [2945]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our manifesto commits us to the control of unscrupulous immigration advisers. We are examining how we will deliver on that commitment.

Pucklechurch Prison

Professor Steven Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to involve the private sector in the running of the proposed prison at Pucklechurch, South Gloucestershire. [2408]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* We will be making an announcement about our approach to the private sector management of prisons and its implications for the prison building programme shortly.

Metropolitan Police (Civil Staff)

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for implementing the recommendations of the recent review of the role of the civilian staff function of the Metropolitan police; and if he will make a statement. [2402]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* I am currently discussing with the Receiver for the Metropolitan Police District and others arrangements for implementing those recommendations from their recent review of support services in which my right hon. Friend, as police authority, has a particular interest. I will write to the hon. Member when those discussions have been concluded.

PRIME MINISTER

Official Residences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has for the more effective use of *(a)* Dorneywood, *(b)* Admiralty House, *(c)* Chevening, *(d)* Chequers and *(e)* 1 Carlton Terrace. [1931]

The Prime Minister: I expect these houses to be effectively used for the purposes for which they were designated, including for official entertainment and for conferences.

Political and Special Advisers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his office; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2427]

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Prime Minister how many of the political appointments to his Office do not have salaries on the special advisers pay spine. [2533]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* The terms and conditions of the appointment of special advisers are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. For a list of the

appointments in Number 10 Downing Street I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) on 2 June, *Official Report*, columns *98–99*.

Special advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually, and are confidential within this range. As under the previous Government, details of current and previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

The only exceptions who are paid outside this range are the two special advisers who have been given additional executive responsibilities under the amended Order in Council, my Chief of Staff Jonathan Powell and my Press Secretary Alastair Campbell. The Remuneration Committee established to advise me on special adviser salaries has decided that they should be paid £87,936. This figure is based on 80 per cent. of payband 7 of the Senior Civil Service range, together with an allowance of £5,000. My current Principal Private Secretary is also in payband 7 and receives an allowance of just over £5,000.

Under the previous Government, the highest paid special adviser was the Head of the Number 10 Policy Unit, who was paid at the lower end of the Permanent Secretary range, which from 1 April 1997 is £91,800 to £157,590.

The appointments in Number 10 Downing Street are my personal appointments following consultation with the Head of the Civil Service.

Eurofighter

Mr. Jack: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the result of his recent discussions with Herr Kohl on Germany's obligations to the Eurofighter Project. [2441]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, on 9 June.

Mr. Jonathan Powell

Dr. Mawhinney: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the names of those normally at present employed to work in *(a)* 10 Downing Street and *(b)* the Cabinet Office who have seen, or had access to classified documents, prior to receiving security clearance, since 1 May. [2559]

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister if Mr. Jonathan Powell will have access to all levels of advice and papers relating to intelligence and security. [2813]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* My Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell, may from time to time need to have access to sensitive intelligence material. He has previously been positively vetted, and his vetting is now being renewed. Pending the completion of that process, the security and intelligence agencies have been consulted about what material he should see and their recommendations are being followed.

Special advisers in my office are, as a matter of routine, being positively vetted, though I do not expect them to have access, for example, to sensitive intelligence material.

Minister without Portfolio

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister Pursuant to his answer of 3 June, *Official Report*, column *134*, what steps he is taking to ensure public accountability for the work undertaken by the Minister without Portfolio. [2561]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* My hon. Friend will, like the Minister without Portfolio in the previous administration, answer written questions from hon. Members about his ministerial role.

Earth Summit

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the ministers, officials and other nominated individuals he intends to accompany him in the United Kingdom delegation to the United Nations General Assembly special session, Earth summit II, in New York on 23 to 27 June. [2876]

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friends, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for International Development and the Minister of State for the Environment, will be attending at various times during the week of the special session.

The following officials will also attend:

No. 10

Mr. A. Allan
Mr. J. Powell
Mr. J. Holmes
Mr. A Campbell

FCO

Mr. P. Lever
Mr. W. Ehrman
Mr. N. Sheinwald
Mr. J. de Fonblanque
Mr. I. Donaldson

DTI

Mr. M. Massey

DOE

Miss D. Nichols
Dr. D. J. Fisk
Ms S. McCabe
Mr. S. Dugdale
Mr. P. F. Unwin
Ms S. Jenkins
Mr. B. P. Oliver
Mr. C. Tompkins
Mr. J. Jacobs
Ms T. Vokes
Mr. J. Irvin

UK Mission to the UN

Sir J. Weston
Mr. S. Gomersall
Mr. P. Gooderham
Ms V. Harris
Mr. A. Lloyd
Ms J. Barrett
Mr. J. Tucknott

Forestry Commission

Mr. M. Dudley

There are expected to be 15 additional support staff.

The following additional individuals are also being invited to join the United Kingdom Delegation:

Mr. Cynog Dafis MP

Ms Joan Walley MP

Minister K. Azopardi (Government of Gibraltar)

Mr. J. Delgado (Government of Gibraltar)

Dr. M. Romeril (Government of Jersey)

Deputy Alistair Layzell (Government of Jersey)

Mr. F. A. Osborn (UNED-UK)

Mr. T. Bigg (UNED-UK)

Councillor John Harman (Local Government International Bureau)

Mr. A. Hams (Local Government International Bureau)

Dr. Richard Robson (ICI)

Professor G. Ashworth (Chairman, Going for Green)

Dr. Elizabeth Nelson (Chairman UK Ecolabelling Board)

Mr. C. Newton (Environment Agency)

Council of Europe and Western European Union

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library the latest Information Bulletin on the activities of the United Kingdom Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of Western European Union covering the period October 1996 to April 1997. [3128]

The Prime Minister: I have done so today.

TREASURY

Beer

Mr. Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to carry out a review of the impact of duty on beer and its relationship to the amount of beer consumed in the United Kingdom from elsewhere in the EU; and if he will make a statement. [2937]

Dawn Primarolo: I am aware of industry concerns regarding cross border shopping and smuggling of alcoholic drinks, including beer, and the duty rates on these products. A lot of work has already been done, with the help of the industry, in assessing the size and nature of the problem and in introducing measures to counter illegal activity. I shall be studying all these issues in depth before coming to conclusions.

Public Utilities

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his definition of the term public utility. [2696]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce details of the windfall levy in his Budget statement on 2 July.

Railtrack

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he considers Railtrack plc to be a public utility. [2695]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: The Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce details of the windfall levy in his Budget statement on 2 July.

Unemployment

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to change the present formula used in the calculation of the unemployed so as better to reflect the numbers of people out of work. [2148]

Mrs. Helen Liddell: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) on 22 May 1997, *Official Report*, Written Answers, column *117*.

EU Budget Contribution

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's contribution to the EU budget. [2264]

Mrs. Liddell: The latest estimate of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Community Budget for the financial year 1997–98 is £2,750 million.

The Government will publish before the recess the annual White Paper on the EC Budget. This will include an estimate of the UK's contribution for the calendar year 1997.

EU Convergence Criteria

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which EU countries currently fulfil the requirements for convergence set out in the Maastricht treaty protocols; and to what extent each country fails to meet each of the criteria. [2367]

Mrs. Liddell: The question of which countries fulfil the necessary conditions for adoption of the single currency will be decided by the Council meeting in the form of Heads of State or Government, in accordance with Article 109j of the EC Treaty. The latest Commission Spring forecasts, which are available in the Library, provide comparable estimates of 1996 outturns for inflation, interest rates, debt and deficits for each member state.

Earnings

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of people in *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* the City of Manchester, *(c)* the Borough of Trafford and *(d)* the constituency of Wythenshawe and Sale, East who currently earn less than *(a)* £2.50, *(b)* £3.00, *(c)* £3.50 and *(d)* £4 per hour. [2552]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Paul Goggins, dated 10 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on earnings in Great Britain, the City of Manchester, the Borough of Trafford and the constituency of Wythenshawe and Sale East.

The latest information, from the New Earnings Survey (NES) April 1996 which preceded the creation of the Wythenshawe and Sale East parliamentary constituency, is given in the table below. Data for the area prior to the last General Election are given instead.

Employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay-period was not affected by absence. NES April 1996

Percentage of employees with hourly earnings (excluding overtime) less than:

	£2.50	*£3.00*	*£3.50*	*£4.00*
Great Britain	1.5	2.8	7.6	14.4
City of Manchester	1.0	1.5	5.0	10.4
Borough of Trafford	1.3	1.9	7.2	13.3
Manchester Wythenshawe constituency	0.9	0.9	2.3	5.5
Altrincham and Sale constituency	0.7	1.5	8.0	14.6

Private Housing Stock

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the market value and the replacement value of the private housing stock as a percentage of money gross domestic product, for each year since 1967. [2292]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Austin Mitchell, dated 10 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on the market value and the replacement value of the private housing stock as a percentage of money gross domestic product, for each year since 1967.

Figures of the current market value of residential buildings by sector, including land, are in the tangible asset balance sheets in chapter 12 of the ONS publication *United Kingdom National Accounts*. Figures of money gross domestic product are in the table 1.1 of the same publication. A copy of this publication is available in the House of Commons Library.

A longer run of data than is available in the publication can be found on the ONS databank which is accessed by the House of Commons Library. Data on the replacement value are not available although information on the net capital stock of dwellings excluding land at current replacement costs are in table 14.7.

Base Rates

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what authority base rates are currently set. [2490]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* Operational responsibility for setting official interest rates has been transferred to the Bank of England.

Building Societies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to meet representatives from building societies that have already converted to the status of banks and are unaffected by the Building Societies (Distributions) Act 1997, to discuss the policies they intend to adopt towards distributing windfall payments to disabled savers. [2304]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* None.

Political and Special Advisers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2417]

Mr. Gordon Brown *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* The paid Special Advisers appointed to the Treasury are Ed Balls, Charlie Whelan, Edward Miliband and Andrew Maugham.

The terms and conditions of each appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special Advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and of previous salary and occupation are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

These are personal appointments by the Chief Secretary and me, following consultation with the Permanent Head of the Department and the Prime Minister.

Non-domestic Rating System

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to make changes to the national non-domestic rating system, and specifically to reduce the multiplier for small shops in local shopping centres. [2549]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

There are sound democratic reasons why business rates should be set locally. I am aware that many small businesses are concerned about their rates bills. We will consult widely and take these concerns into account as we develop our policies.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

European Union

5. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will resist the proposals in the draft treaty of Amsterdam for the Court of Justice to be given jurisdiction in relation to justice and home affairs in the European Union. [1162]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Government would only agree to any increase in the role of the European Court of Justice where that is compatible with the UK interest.

St. Helena

22. **Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last visited St. Helena to discuss economic affairs. [1179]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not visited St. Helena and has no immediate plans to do so.

Council of Ministers

23. **Mr. Rhodri Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what preparations he has set in train for the UK presidency of the European Council of Ministers and its summit meetings. [1180]

Mr. Doug Henderson: Planning for the Presidency is already underway. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary chairs a Ministerial Task Force on the UK Presidency which has looked at a number of issues including policy priorities and presentational strategy. In addition to the European Council being held in Cardiff in June 1998, other Summit level meetings might include: a Council of Heads of State or Government to decide the participants in stage III of EMU; an event to mark the formal start of the EU Enlargement process; a number of meetings with third countries. Copies of the preliminary Calendar of Councils for our Presidency have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Kashmir

24. **Ms Dean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards Kashmir. [1181]

34. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on Kashmir. [1191]

Mr. Fatchett: We are deeply concerned by the continuing conflict in Kashmir and support the search for a just and lasting solution. We condemn the acts of terrorism and the abuses of human rights which bring suffering to the population. We call for an end to all external support for violence in Kashmir. We welcome the dialogue between India and Pakistan and urge them to pursue meaningful talks on Kashmir and the other issues that divide them.

35. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to meet representatives of India and Pakistan to discuss Kashmir. [1192]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer the hon. Member to the response that I gave earlier in the House today to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

Export Trade

25. **Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the measures taken in his Department in co-operation with the Department of Trade and Industry to promote Britain's export trade. [1182]

Mr. Fatchett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given earlier in the House today by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley).

UN Security Council

26. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met his counterparts from other member states of the European Union to discuss matters relating to the membership and structure of the Security Council of the United Nations. [1183]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not yet had the opportunity for a discussion of these issues with his European Union counterparts.

Social Chapter

31. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards the United Kingdom signing the social chapter. [1188]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have made clear our commitment to signing up to the Social Chapter. Incorporation of the Chapter into the main EC Treaty and its extension to the UK are being considered within the Inter-Governmental Conference. The target for conclusion of the IGC is the Amsterdam European Council on 16–17 June.

27. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans the Government have for signing up to the European social chapter provisions allowing for qualified majority voting. [1184]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We have made clear our intention to sign up to all the existing provisions of the Social Chapter. Qualified majority voting already applies to areas such as working conditions, equal opportunities for men and women, and health and safety. but we will not agree any extension of QMV to areas vital to competitiveness.

Human Rights

28. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the role of human rights in the Government's foreign policy. [1185]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave earlier in the House today to the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton).

Cyprus

29. **Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Cyprus to discuss an equitable and lasting settlement. [1186]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We are strongly in favour of a settlement as I made clear in the Adjournment Debate on Cyprus on 4 June. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Cyprus in January, and discussed the Cyprus problem with President Clerides, Mr. Denktash, and a broad range of politicians and business leaders from both communities. There are no arrangements at present for a further meeting.

37. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects for a settlement in Cyprus. [1195]

Mr. Doug Henderson: A solution to the Cyprus problem is more urgent than ever. I urge both sides to work constructively with the UN for face-to-face negotiations leading to a comprehensive political settlement. We will continue to work actively to support that process.

Defence Exports

30. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will publish his criteria for determining the granting of British defence equipment export licences. [1187]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The review of criteria used in considering licence applications for the export of conventional arms is being conducted as a matter of urgency. The new criteria will be made available to the House when the Review is complete.

Congo

32. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about United Kingdom relations with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [1189]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 2 June 1997, *Official Report*, columns *78–79*.

Gibraltar

33. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Spanish Foreign Minister to discuss Gibraltar. [1190]

Mr. Doug Henderson: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met the Spanish Foreign Minister on 2 June in Luxembourg, when they discussed a number of issues of mutual interest, including Gibraltar.

EU (Applicant Nations)

36. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he made at the European Union Foreign Ministers' Conference at Nordwijk to accelerate the entry of applicant nations into the European Union. [1194]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Informal European Council at Nordwijk discussed the Intergovernmental Conference. Enlargement of the EU was not on the agenda. however the UK remains a firm supporter of enlargement and is determined to see accession negotiations begin on time, six months after the end of the IGC.

Chemical Weapons

38. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about his Department's policy towards chemical weapons. [1196]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Government is committed to the elimination of all chemical weapons and will ensure that the UK continues to play a leading role in international efforts to prevent their proliferation. I welcome the recent ratification of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) by the United States and very much hope that Russia, the other declared possessor of chemical weapons, will shortly follow suit. The First Conference of States Parties to the CWC concluded on 23 May in The Hague. It was successful in taking the key decisions necessary to establish the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and ensure the full and effective implementation of the Convention.

Quota Hoppers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made to address the problem of quota hoppers. [1169]

Mr. Doug Henderson: We attach great importance to achieving progress on this issue and we are striving to secure the best possible deal before the conclusion of the IGC. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made our concerns clear in his meetings with European colleagues. We are looking actively at all available options with the European Commission and the Presidency.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the FCO budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2115]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 9 June, *Official Report*, column *310*.

Geneva Conventions

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further preparations are required to enable ratification of the 1977 additional protocols to the Geneva conventions by Her Majesty's Government; and on what time scale these are expected to be completed. [2541]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We will need to consider the question of national statements which may be made by the United Kingdom when ratifying. We are pursuing this as a matter of priority.

Libya

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on any conclusions he has reached about the consequences of Lockerbie and UN sanctions against Libya, since the Minister of State met the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Dr. Turner) at the Foreign Office on Wednesday 14 May. [1096]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Ministers are still acquainting themselves with the complex details of the Lockerbie tragedy.

WALES

Unemployment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women aged 24 years or below are unemployed. [1257]

Mr. Hain: In April 1997 there were 17,611 men and 6,469 women in Wales on the claimant count aged 24 years and under. These figures are not seasonally adjusted. The Office for National Statistics has announced a public consultation on the unemployment figures.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes he proposes in *(a)* the operation of and *(b)* the responsibilities of the Welsh Development Agency. [2004]

Mr. Ron Davies: In line with the Government's manifesto commitment, I am considering the options for establishing an economic powerhouse for Wales, including the role of the WDA. I shall announce my conclusions in due course.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the total Welsh Office budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2112]

Mr. Hain: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade, *Official Report*, 9 June 1997, column *310*.

Regional Policy

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for changes to regional policy in Wales. [2003]

Mr. Ron Davies: I intend to publish an economic development strategy document later this summer. This will set out my general approach and priorities.

Communications Masts

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance is provided to national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty by the Welsh Office on the location of telecommunications mast. [2370]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Planning policy guidance on development in national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty and on the location of telecommunications masts is provided in Planning Guidance (Wales) Planning Policy. Further advice, which should be taken into account by local planning authorities in determining planning applications, is given in technical advice Note (Wales) 8 Telecommunications, which issued for consultation in December 1996 and in annexes to Planning Policy Guidance note 8 Telecommunications.

Health Service Appointments

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about future appointments to health authorities and health trusts in Wales. [2378]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Appointments will be made in line with the guidance published by the Commissioner for Public Appointments which includes provision for public advertisement.

Euro-freight Terminal

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the proposed Euro-freight terminal for south Wales. [2368]

Mr. Ron Davies: The Chairman of the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) wrote to me on 29 May outlining his recommendations on the proposed terminal. I am considering the report and will reach a conclusion shortly.

Ovarian Cancer

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of ovarian cancer have been reported in Wales in each of the last five years. [2190]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information, which relates to the latest five years for which data are available, is given in the following table:

Cases of ovarian cancer registered as newly diagnosed

	Number
1987	340
1988	349
1989	342
1990	322
1991	[1]327

[1] Estimated figure based on 90 per cent. completeness.

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many deaths from ovarian cancer have been reported in Wales in each of the last five years. [2191]

Mr. Griffiths: The annual numbers of registered deaths of Welsh residents from ovarian cancer, recorded by the Office for National Statistics, are given in the following table:

Ovarian cancer deaths[1]

	Number
1992	225
1993	221
1994	238
1995	233
1996	215

[1] ICD 183–International Classification of Diseases, 9th revision.

Dental Services

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many dentists in *(a)* Abergavenny, *(b)* Monmouth and *(c)* Chepstow provide dental treatment under the national health service. [2373]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The number of General Dental Practitioners with at least one contract to treat NHS patients is as follows:

	Principals
Abergavenny	8
Monmouth	8
Chepstow	10

Source:
Dental Practice Board.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

Vehicles on Byways

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport, and the Regions what plans his Department has to publish the results of the consultation process on vehicles on byways; and if he will make a statement. [2117]

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the time scale for publication of the results of the consultation process on vehicles on byways; and if he will make a statement. [2787]

Mr. Meacher: We are considering the issue of the consultation exercise on vehicles on byways, which was undertaken last year. We intend to make an announcement shortly.

Single Regeneration Budget

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to encourage bids from the most deprived areas of the United Kingdom for round 4 of the single regeneration budget; and if he will make a statement. [2152]

Ms Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 22 May 1997, *Official Report*, column *152*, which indicated that there will be greater emphasis in the assessment of proposals for support from Round 4 of the SRB Challenge Fund on tackling the needs of communities in the most deprived areas.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department, and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to local authorities in England of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement; [2123]

(2) what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department, and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the Department of the Environment budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2124]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on Monday 9 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *310*.

English House Condition Survey

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects to publish the energy report relating to the 1996 English House Condition Survey; and if he will make a statement. [2212]

Mr. Raynsford: We expect to publish detailed energy findings from the 1996 English House Condition Survey by Autumn 1998. However, some information on heating facilities and thermal insulation, will be included in the main report of this survey, scheduled for publication before the end of this year.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he proposes following the report of the findings of the energy survey contained within the 1991 English House Condition Survey. [2211]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government is committed to improving the energy efficiency of the housing stock revealed by the 1991 English House Condition Survey. Despite existing provisions to promote energy efficiency and to improve the stock—through the Home Energy Conservation Act, the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme, the work of the Energy Saving Trust and the Department's best practice programme and through private sector renovation grants and the housing renewal programmes of local authorities and housing associations, there is still a substantial backlog of housing in poor condition and with unsatisfactory energy efficiency characteristics. The Government is reviewing policies to achieve more effective action to remedy sub-standard and energy inefficient housing. New Supplementary Credit Approvals issued as a result of the Capital Receipts' initiative will allow local authorities to proceed more quickly with action to tackle these problems to the extent that they fit with local priorities.

VAT on Domestic Fuel

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that the proposed reduction in the rate of VAT on domestic fuel does not lead to an increase in carbon dioxide emissions. [2082]

Ms Angela Eagle: Protection from the effects of global warming and the development of sustainable environmental policies cannot proceed in isolation from considerations of social equity.

We estimate that the reduction in VAT on domestic fuel to 5 per cent. will result in an annual increase in carbon dioxide emissions of about 0.24 million tonnes of carbon by 2010, (about 0.15 per cent. of current carbon

dioxide emissions). We shall take account of this effect in developing the programme to meet our target to reduce total carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. by 2010.

We are developing policy options which will contribute towards our 2010 target and which will include improvements in domestic and industrial energy efficiency, an integrated transport policy to tackle the projected growth in emissions from road transport, and an increase in the amount of electricity generated from renewable sources and combined heat and power schemes.

Care of the Elderly (Essex)

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the funding allocated to Essex county council in the 1997–98 Revenue Support Grant in respect of care of the elderly. [2077]

Mr. Raynsford: The distribution of Revenue Support Grant for 1997–98 is now a closed matter, having been approved by Parliament in February as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement. Discussions with local government on the distribution of Revenue Support Grant for 1998–99 are currently in progress. The standard spending assessment for elderly residential social services is among the elements which we expect to examine this year.

Challenge Funds

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he plans to assess the effectiveness of schemes currently supported by the single regeneration budget challenge funds; and if he will make a statement. [2151]

Ms Angela Eagle: The Government has commissioned the Department of Land Economy at the University of Cambridge to carry out a long term evaluation of the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund, which will include an assessment of the effectiveness of schemes supported by the Challenge Fund.

The Department intends to obtain value for money for its expenditure on the Single Regeneration Budgets.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what are the sums currently held by each local housing authority in respect of capital receipts. [2160]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for Local Government and Housing on 4 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *198*.

Out-of-town Development Schemes

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many out-of town development schemes are awaiting decision by him. [2163]

Mr. Raynsford: We have seven cases awaiting decision by my right hon. Friend, following receipt of the Inspector's report.

Planning Applications

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for how long each called-in planning application in England has been awaiting decision. [2451]

Mr. Raynsford: The following table lists by Government Office region those called-in planning applications in England which are currently awaiting determination following receipt of the Inspector's report.

Region	*Development proposal*	*Date inspector's report received*
North West	Equestrian centre, Skelmersdale, West Lancashire	26 July 1996
	Prison development, Agecroft, Salford	27 January 1997
	Retail development, Cockermouth, Cumbria	30 January 1997
Yorkshire and The Humber	Residential development, Ingbirchworth, South Yorkshire	18 March 1997
	Public house/restaurant, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire	19 May 1997
	Retail development, Doncaster, South Yorkshire	21 May 1997
Merseyside	Motorway service area, M6, St. Helens	25 July 1996
	Airport expansion, Liverpool Airport (3 applications)	26 July 1996
	Retail development, Netherton	28 November 1996
	Retail development, St. Helens	7 March 1997
West Midlands	Retail development, Dudley, West Midlands	7 March 1997
	Industrial development, Minworth, Birmingham	29 April 1997
	Industrial development, Walmley, Birmingham	29 April 1997
East Midlands	Retail development and football stadium, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire (4 applications)	6 December 1996
	Retail development, Southwell, Nottinghamshire	4 February 1997
	Retail development, Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire (3 applications)	17 April 1997
	Mixed use development, A38/M1, Derbyshire	22 May 1997
South West	Retail development, Cirencester, Gloucestershire (2 applications)	8 November 1996
	Torbay Ring Road, Torbay, Devon (2 applications)	22 January 1997
	Residential development, Alveston, Gloucestershire	14 March 1997
	Retail development, Tidworth, Somerset	1 April 1997
	Airpark, Henstridge, Somerset	21 May 1997
	Change of use, Wapley, Gloucestershire	28 May 1997

Region	Development proposal	Date inspector's report received
Eastern	Riding school, Shenley, Hertfordshire	13 November 1996
	Household waste site, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire	10 December 1996
	Football stadium, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire	10 December 1996
South East	Golf course, near Amersham Buckinghamshire	10 August 1994
	Gypsy site development, Dunsfold, Surrey	22 January 1996
	Waste transfer station, Rye, East Sussex	September 1996
	Residential development, Hooe, East Sussex	7 January 1997
	Car park, near Sevenoaks, Kent	22 May 1997
London	Residential development, West Drayton, Middlesex	1 August 1996
	Football stadium, Morden	2 May 1997

Water Companies

Dr. Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to ensure that water companies take responsibility for leaks from domestic supply pipes. [2534]

Ms Angela Eagle: It is our view that leakage rates are still far too high. At the Water Summit on 19 May, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the Director General of Water Services would set tough mandatory targets for total leakage, including leakage from consumers pipes. Many water companies already provide a free leakage detection and repair service for supply pipes owned by household customers. My right hon. Friend asked all companies to consider providing this service.

Herbal Medicines

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to meet representatives from the national Institute of Medical Herbalists to discuss the use of rare plants in herbal medicine and commercial cultivation projects; and if he will make a statement. [2702]

Ms Angela Eagle: The United Kingdom is to present a paper on traditional medicines to the Conference of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), currently taking place in Harare. The aim of the paper is not to question the importance of traditional medicine as a legitimate form of medicinal treatment, but to encourage the search for ways in which its use can continue without threatening species in the wild with extinction. At present we have no immediate plans to meet the National Institute of Medicinal Herbalists, but have consulted relevant UK organisations, including representatives of the herbal medicine sector. We have also received the support of Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Endangered Species

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans his Department has to encourage the extension of the international controlled trade list of endangered species; and if he will make a statement. [2703]

Ms Angela Eagle: A new EC Regulation implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species within the Community took effect on 1 June. It includes all species listed on CITES together with additional species whose import into the Community will be monitored by Member States.

The next CITIES Conference of the Parties is currently taking place in Harare, and will consider proposals for amending the species lists. The United Kingdom will consider these carefully in co-ordination with other EU Member States.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what compensation was paid to residents of West Cumbria for reasons of blight following upon NIREX's proposals for the disposal of nuclear waste in the area; [2243]

(2) what discussions have taken place between departmental officials and organisations representing persons who live in the community recently identified as the potential site for nuclear waste disposal on the subject of compensation for property blight. [2244]

Mr. Raynsford: Neither UK Nirex Ltd's proposal for a Rock Characterisation Facility near Sellafield, which was rejected by the local planning authority and on appeal by the Secretary of State, nor their consideration of alternatives sites, which they no longer plan to carry forward, gives rise to any entitlement to compensation for planning blight.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports on proposals for potential nuclear waste disposal sites have been brought to the attention of Ministers in the last six weeks. [2242]

Ms Angela Eagle: DOE Ministers have received no reports on proposals for potential nuclear waste disposal sites other than in respect of Nirex's investigations of Sellafield and Dounreay.

Red Lion Hotel, Somerton

Mr. David Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received concerning planning applications APP/R3325/E/96/811767, APP/R3325/E/96 812513, APP/R3325/A/95/254103 and APP/R3325/A/96/265998, referring to the Red Lion Hotel, Somerton; and if he will uphold the recommendations of the planning inspector, Mr. S. L. Dickinson, following the inquiry of 29 to 31 May 1996. [2835]

Mr. Raynsford: To date 22 representations have been received. Inspector's recommendations will be taken in to account along with the further representations in reaching a decision on how to proceed with determining the applications.

TRANSPORT

M6 (Noise Reduction)

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to re-surface the M6 motorway between Lancaster university and junction 34 with noise-reducing material. [2834]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Laurie Haynes to Mr. Hilton Dawson, dated 10 June 1997:

The Minister for Transport in London has asked me to reply to your recent question about the plans to resurface the M6 motorway between Lancaster University and Junction 34 and the use of noise reducing material.

Where a road needs resurfacing we consider using materials which have beneficial noise properties where it is cost effective and affordable. Account also needs to be taken of the effects on safety, the life expectancy of the surfacing to be used and the condition of the existing road base.

Proposals for resurfacing this section of the M6 are being developed and options for noise reducing surfaces will be given full consideration as part of the preparation for the works. Their timing will depend on the availability of resourc

Plutonium Waste

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from European Governments about proposals by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. to enter national airspace with planes carrying plutonium waste. [2156]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This Department has not received any representations from European governments in connection with any plans by UK airlines to carry plutonium waste on behalf of British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. through their airspace. Neither, I understand, has the Foreign and Commonwealth Office or the Department of Environment.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he plans to approve proposals by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. to fly plutonium waste from the United Kingdom to Europe. [2157]

Ms Jackson: There are no plans for plutonium waste to be transported by air to, or from, the United Kingdom.

Since 1973 Mixed Oxide (MoX) fuel has been transported from BNFL by air. Currently there are about six flights a year to European destinations. MoX comprises oxides of uranium with a small proportion of plutonium and is carried in ceramic form in packages meeting International Atomic Energy Agency standards. In the unlikely event of an aircraft accident MoX poses no significant risk to public health.

Road Safety

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many road *(a)* injuries and *(b)* fatalities occur each year from the loss of wheels from heavy goods and passenger vehicles; and what research his Department intends to undertake into this issue. [2652]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Data on the specific causes of accidents are not routinely collected, and therefore figures on the number of fatalities and injuries arising from accidents due to wheel loss are not available.

Following joint discussions with the Vehicle Inspectorate and the Association of Chief Police Officers, a nation-wide survey looking at the extent of the problem of wheel detachment from heavy goods vehicles and passenger vehicles was started in February this year. The survey has recently finished and the results are being analysed. The need for further action will be considered in light of the survey's findings.

The Department is also about to launch an updated leaflet providing guidance on correct maintenance procedures to help reduce incidents of wheel detachment.

Car Clocking

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has for measures to reduce the incidence of car clocking. [2648]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Government deplores the "clocking" of motor vehicles. In 1992, a voluntary mileage recording system, administered by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, was introduced to assist private sector organisations with the compilation of mileage registers which might eventually be made available to the public. Since then, over 10 million mileage figures have been captured.

The question of making the provision of mileages a mandatory requirement of the registration system is currently under review.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimates his Department has made of *(a)* the cost to consumers of car clocking and *(b)* the number of incidents occurring each year. [2649]

Ms Jackson: The Institute of Trading Standards Administration (ITSA) has calculated that each year profits of around £100 million are made through the clocking of vehicles. This is calculated on the basis that the value of a care increases by an average of £30 for every 1,000 miles taken off the clock.

There are no reliable estimates of the number of cars clocked in the UK each year.

Delegated Driving Examiners

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many checks have been undertaken by his Department on delegated driving examiners; and which organisations have been allocated delegated examiners. [2644]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Delegated driving test examiners have been authorised for the Ministry of Defence (MOD), 26 Police Forces and 53 Fire Brigades, the Royal Mail, Birmingham City Council and 50 bus company groups.

Delegated examiners are normally trained by the Driving Standards Agency, the part of the Department responsible for conducting driving tests generally. The Agency aims to carry out standards supervision visits to the bus companies on a quarterly basis, and has close technical co-operation with the Ministry of Defence on test standards matters. The Agency is currently initiating discussions with the relevant police and fire authorities about test standards issues.

A40

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the objections received to the orders for the de-trunking of the A40 through Cheltenham. [2538]

Ms Glenda Jackson: There are 32 outstanding letters of objection to the draft order to de-trunk the A40 through Cheltenham and to trunk the A436 from the A40 at Shipton Solers to the A417 at Air Ballon roundabout. All object to the trunking of the A436. The objections mainly concern: the unsuitability of the A436 to take extra traffic; the need for improvements to be carried out to the A436; the effects of more traffic using the unimproved A417 at Crickley Hill and congestion at Air Balloon roundabout.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce whether there will be a public inquiry into the de-trunking of the A40 through Cheltenham. [2539]

Ms Jackson: The Department is at present considering objections received following the publication of a draft order to de-trunk the A40 through Cheltenham and to trunk the A436 from the A40 at Shipton Solers to the A417 at Air Balloon roundabout. Until this process is complete I cannot predict whether a public inquiry will be necessary. An announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Tachographs

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many silent checks aimed at detecting drivers interfering with tachograph records there were in each of the last 12 months; [2655]

(2) what percentage of heavy goods vehicle spot-checks were undertaken *(a)* between the hours of 1900 and 0600 on weekdays and *(b)* at weekends in each of the last two years. [2656]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Vehicle Inspectorate to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Ron Oliver to Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, dated 10 June 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions about the number of silent checks aimed at detecting drivers interfering with tachograph records for each of the last 12 months; and the percentage of HGV spot-checks undertaken (a) between the hours of 1900 and 0600 on weekdays and (b) at weekends for each of the last two years.

Details of the number of vehicles silent checked with the aim of detecting tachograph interference are as follows:

Month	*HGV*	*PSV*	*Total*
1996			
May	447	149	596
June	632	698	1,330
July	576	866	1,442
August	756	354	1,110
September	305	122	427
October	606	50	656
November	317	96	413
December	469	307	776
1997			
January	236	43	279
February	290	33	323
March	282	276	558
April	270	27	297

Data on the percentage of HGV spot checks undertaken (a) between 1900 and 0600 on weekdays and (b) at weekends is not available separately. The total percentage of out-of-hours spot checks carried out between 1900 and 0600 and at weekends (against an agreed 5% minimum target) for each of the last two financial years is:

1995–96: 7.49

1996–97: 8.25

Channel Tunnel

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library copies of the correspondence between Eurotunnel and the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority regarding the decision to re-open the channel tunnel. [2651]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I am not in a position to do so. This would be a breach of Clause 33 of the Concession Agreement of 1986, covering intellectual property and confidentiality, which includes a requirement on all parties to that Agreement, and also the Intergovernmental Commission and Safety Authority, to hold in confidence all documents supplied to them by, or on behalf of, any other party.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if tests will be carried out by Eurotunnel on all rolling stock operated through the channel tunnel to ensure that smoke will not penetrate during a fire or similar incident. [2658]

Ms Jackson: The Concession Agreement requires that all safety arrangements will apply to any trains using the tunnel. The authorisation given by the Intergovernmental Commission bringing the tunnel into service states that Eurotunnel are responsible for ensuring that all trains using its infrastructure meet the required safety standards, including the efficacy of smoke dampers.

The Safety Authority monitors maintenance of all rolling stock through direct examination by its inspectors and working groups and through monitoring audits carried out by Eurotunnel's Health Safety and Quality Directorate.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how the channel tunnel safety authority will ensure that the maintenance procedures for the ventilation dampers in Le Shuttle wagons are regularly reviewed. [2659]

Ms Jackson: The Channel Tunnel Safety Authority is required under the Treaty of Canterbury to advise and assist the Intergovernmental Commission of all matters concerning safety in the construction and operation of the Fixed Link.

The Safety Authority monitors all aspects of Eurotunnel's operations to ensure that safety standards are met. This is achieved through examianton of detailed incident reports and regular operational reports from Eurotunnel and by the actions of Safety Authority appointed inspectors and specialist working groups.

Safety Authority inspectors recently witnessed smoke penetration tests carried out by Eurotunnel to verify the smoke tightness of amenity coaches used in the HGV shuttle service.

Rail Driver Fatigue

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what procedures his Department has in place to ensure that the research undertaken by British Rail on the effects of driver fatigue will be disseminated to all rail operating companies. [2657]

Ms Glenda Jackson: British Rail's report into this research was disseminated to the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) within its ownership at the time of the report's production, and to Railtrack Plc, who undertook to disseminate the relevant findings of the report to the other TOCs.

In carrying out its function of monitoring compliance with safety regulations, the Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate will take account of this report's safety recommendations.

Rail Journey Statistics

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list, for each franchise holder, the most recent statistics relating to the percentage of rail journeys delayed and cancelled. [2458]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Franchising Director has today published the third quarterly OPRAF Performance bulletin which contains the information requested. I have placed a copy in the Library.

Trunk Roads Programme

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to review the trunk roads programme. [2475]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We intend to announce details of the review shortly.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department, and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the Department of Transport budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2125]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to him in the *Official Report*, Monday 9 June, column *310*, by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

Aviation Standards

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for an increase in inspections of Moroccan-registered aircraft following the FAA's announcement that Morocco fails to meet international aviation standards. [2654]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We have no evidence to suggest that Moroccan-registered aircraft flying to the UK are unsafe and have no current plans to inspect such aircraft. Morocco has applied for an assessment under the International Civil Aviation Organisation's safety oversight programme and we will review the position once that assessment has been carried out.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will consider the introduction of a scheme similar to that operated by the Federal Aviation Administration for identifying countries that do not meet international aviation standards. [2650]

Ms Jackson: We consider it more effective to balance support for international programmes assessing the safety oversight of countries with firm action with respect to any aircraft flying to the United Kingdom that are found not to be conforming to international safety standards.

We are continuing to contribute to the safety assessments being carried out by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and are taking a leading role in an initiative by the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) to increase the number of inspections of foreign aircraft using ECAC airports, to share the results and other safety information and to organise joint actions when appropriate.

Since 1 May we have asked the Civil Aviation Authority to carry out inspections of eight foreign aircraft at UK airports. Two Nigerian-registered freight aircraft, were detained and we will not issue further permits in respect of Nigerian-registered aircraft until we are assured of their safe operation.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will identify the location of the site for the disposal of nuclear waste referred to as site 6. [297]

Mr. Battle: Following the dismissal of Nirex's appeal against refusal of planning permission for a Rock Characterisation Facility at Sellafield, the company has no plans to commence investigations at sites there or elsewhere. Revealing the location of potential sites in these circumstances could unnecessarily cause anxiety to people living nearby.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade over what time scale radioactive wastes arising from the reprocessing of Italian Magnox fuel will be returned to their country of origin. [1796]

Mr. Battle: The magnox reprocessing contract with ENEL signed in 1979 included an option for BNFL to return waste to Italy. The contract, and its terms, has been the subject of an exchange of Letters between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Italy.

Wastes arising from the reprocessing of the fuel will be returned to their country of origin as soon as it practicable. BNFL is currently negotiating with ENEL on the form and timescale for such waste return.

Plutonium

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what provision has been set aside in the accounts of Magnox Electric for the long term management of the United Kingdom plutonium inventory. [1792]

Mr. Battle: Magnox Electric makes provisions in its accounts for the long term (100 years) storage and subsequent retrieval of all plutonium arising from the reprocessing of its spent magnox fuel. The current provision is some £200 million (3 per cent. discounted net present value).

Mr. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade over what time scale it is planned to use plutonium fuel in Magnox reactors. [1793]

Mr. Battle: Magnox Electric plc has no plans to use plutonium or MOX fuel in its magnox reactors.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what financial responsibility for the plutonium stockpiles arising from the reprocessing of advanced gas reactor fuel is borne by public funds. [1794]

Mr. Battle: Financial responsibility for the plutonium expected to arise from the reprocessing of AGR fuel rests with utilities in the private sector with the exception of a small amount, less than 1 per cent. arising from the Windscale AGR at Sellafield.

BNFL

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proportion of the total future financial liabilities that would arise in the United Kingdom, as reported by the OECD in 1996, would fall to BNFL to disburse. [1779]

Mr. Battle: The OECD indicative scheduled disbursement of provisions for liabilities in the UK shows cumulative expenses as £45 billion to the year 2100. BNFL's published accounts indicate total costs for liabilities at their sites as £17.3 billion (undiscounted). BNFL's own share of future liabilities at 31 March 1996 are £2.6 billion (undiscounted).

Details of, and information relating to, provisions for total future liabilities for which BNFL are liable, are contained in the company's annual report and accounts, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) over what time scale she plans that Magnox Electric will merge with BNFL; [1795]

(2) what financial arrangements have been requested by BNFL in connection with the merger with Magnox Electric. [1797]

Mr. Battle: The aim is that integration should take place in two key stages. The first stage, transfer of the Government's shares in Magnox Electric to BNFL, should take place in the autumn with the second stage, full integration of the combined businesses of the two companies expected to be completed about 12 months after that, subject to the companies meeting the requirements of the relevant regulators. Constructive discussions on the detailed arrangements for the merger, including the financial arrangements, are continuing between all parties, including BNFL, Magnox Electric and my Department.

Part-time Employees

Mr. Dafis: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to extend the legal safeguards against unfair discrimination by employers in respect of part-time employees. [2086]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Part-time workers have equal statutory rights with full-time workers and their rights have been clarified in recent court judgments, which we welcome. At present the Government have no plans to introduce further legislation on part-time work.

The social partners at European reached an agreement on part-time work on 6 June 1997. The Commission may consequently decide to consult member states on a measure to implement this agreement. They have asked the Commission to propose that this agreement be implemented by the Council. The Government will consider any proposal, when it is submitted to Council, against the Government's criteria of promoting employability and competitiveness.

Funeral Services

Mr. Green: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what action she plans to take to prevent anti-competitive monopolies developing among funeral directors and crematoria. [2022]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I am aware of concerns which have been aired.

The Director-General of Fair Trading is responsible for investigating possible anti-competitive and monopolistic practices. He has no plans to take action against funeral directors and crematoria, but has powers to act if the evidence suggests that there is cause for concern. Anyone with evidence of anti-competitive or monopolistic behaviour should forward the information to the Director-General.

Rail Privatisation

Mr. Miller: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will refer the sale of British Rail International Ltd to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. [2006]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Office of Fair Trading is making inquiries to establish whether the acquisition of British Rail International Limited by Grandes Lignes International SA may constitute a qualifying merger situation under the Fair Trading Act 1973. If so, the Director-General of Fair Trading will advise whether or not it should be referred to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board will take her decision in the light of that advice.

Renewable Energy

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade (1) how she plans to promote renewable energy sources; [2232]

(2) if she will make a statement on the impact of the reduction in the Non-Fossil Fuel Levy in April on subsidies for renewable energy projects; [2230]

(3) if she will make a statement on the current levels of financial support and projected levels of support in each of the next five years, for *(a)* fossil fuel industries, *(b)* wind power, *(c)* solar electricity, *(d)* wave power and *(e)* nuclear power. [2233]

Mr. Battle: The Government propose to undertake a new and strong drive to develop renewable energy sources in line with our manifesto commitment. To this end I anticipate reviewing policy including considerations of what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of UK's electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010 and how renewables can make an effective contribution to meeting requirements for future greenhouse gas reduction commitments. I will make a further announcement in due course. In the meantime the Government's new and renewable energy programme, currently underway will continue. I have already announced that I will initiative shortly a consultation exercise with the relevant trade bodies of the renewable energy industry, OFFER, and the Regional Electricity Companies on a fifth Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO) Order for renewable energy in England and Wales, leading to an announcement later in the year.

The reduction in the rate of the Fossil Fuel Levy from 3.7 per cent. to 2.2 per cent. with effect from 1 April 1997 was due to reduced payments to the nuclear industry. The reduction had no effect on the level of support for renewable energy projects.

Over the coming months the Government will be considering the balance of activities within the spending plans it inherited to ensure that they reflect the Government's priorities. The results of my reviews of NFFO 5 and renewable energy policy will be fed into this wider exercise. The Department's expenditure plans for the Government's renewable energy; nuclear; clean coal; oil and gas; and environment programmes for the three year's 1997–98 to 1999–2000 may be found on page 37 of "Trade and Industry: The Government's Expenditure Plans 1997–98 to 1999–2000". A copy of the Plans is available in the Library of the House. Historical expenditure information on the Government's wind, solar and wave programmes is also available from my Department.

EU Regional Aid

Mr. Cummings: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what submissions her Department has made to the European Commission concerning the review of funds available under objective 2 of European regional aid. [2167]

Mrs. Roche: The Government and local partners have been negotiating since August 1996 with the Commission on the programmes for grant in 12 European structural funds objective 2 areas in Britain for the period 1997–99. The Commission has now adopted the majority of these programmes and is likely to complete the remainder shortly.

For the period from 2000 onwards, the money available under objective 2 and the other objectives depends on Commission proposals for future financing of the EU and for reform of the structural funds. It is likely to put proposals forward after the completion of the Inter-Governmental conference. The Government have not put forward detailed submissions at this early stage, but we are looking for a package which is affordable, simpler and more efficient, and fair.

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if the United Kingdom qualifies for contributions from the EU/EEC cohesion fund on the basis of (i) 1993, (ii) 1994, (iii) 1995 and (iv) 1996 gross domestic product figures. [2381]

Mrs. Roche: No. Article 2.1 of the Cohesion Fund Regulation restricts eligibility to member states with a per capita gross national product (GNP), measured in purchasing power parities (PPP), of less than 90 per cent. of the Community average and which have a programme leading to the fulfilment of the conditions of economic convergence referred to in Article 104c of the EC Treaty. The United Kingdom does not qualify: its per capita GNP (PPP) has been and is above this level.

Atlantic Frontier

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment she has made of the environmental impact of the Atlantic frontier development; and on what evidence this assessment has been made. [2430]

Mr. Battle: An assessment of environmental impact and a shoreline sensitivity study were carried out by BP in relation to its applications for consent to develop the Foinaven and Schiehallion discoveries. In addition, the largest offshore environmental study ever undertaken in UK waters was carried out to the west of Shetland on behalf of a group of oil companies by the Southhampton Oceanography Centre. An area the size of Wales was surveyed and much valuable information was acquired. The results of this work provide baseline environmental data as part of the work companies must do to satisfy Government environmental requirements.

Ms Walley: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has in respect of further development at the Atlantic frontier; and if she will make a statement. [2431]

Mr. Battle: Two developments have already been approved in the Atlantic Margin: the Foinaven and Schiehallion fields operated by BP. Other discoveries are identified in the "Energy Report 1997", a copy of which

is available in the Library. My Department will continue to consider proposals of further development in this oil and gas province which respect the environmental sensitivities of the area and the interests of the other sea users.

Clean Coal Technology

Mr Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what reduction in CO_2 emissions is made when so-called clean coal technology is used instead of other existing forms of generation. [2641]

Mr. Battle: The tables set out the reductions in CO_2 emissions from various clean coal power generation technologies currently available or under development compared with a reference conventional pulverised coal plant. The information was provided by IEA Coal Research—The Clean Coal Centre and will appear in a report to be published later this year by the Centre. The table indicates some 20–30 per cent. reduction may be possible if clean coal plant replaces existing conventional coal plant. however all coal fired generation releases significantly more CO_2 per unit of electricity than combined cycle gas turbine stations and there would be an increase in emissions if clean coal plant replaced such plant. There would also be an increase in emissions of CO_2 if clean coal plant replaced oil fired plant, nuclear or renewables sources of energy.

Reductions in carbon dioxide emissions from various clean coal technologies compared to a conventional reference plant

Technology		*Net plant efficiency, per cent. LHV*[1]	*CO_2 reduction per cent.*
Conventional systems			
Pulverised coal	Reference plant	36	0
	Subcritical steam	39	8
	Supercritical steam	42–45	14–20
	Ultra-supercritical steam	47–52	23–31
AFBC[2]	Subcritical steam	39	6
Combined cycles			
IGCC[3]	Demonstrated systems	38–43	8–18
	Advanced systems	45–47	22–25
PFBC[4]	Subcritical steam	44	19
	Supercritical steam	46	22
Hybrid[5]	Subcritical steam	47–49	23–27
	Supercritical steam	52	31

Notes:
[1] LHV—Low Heating Value.
[2] AFBC—Atmospheric Fluidised Bed Combustion.
[3] IGCC—Integrated Gasification Combined Cycle.
[4] PFBC—Pressurised Fluidised Bed Combustion.
[5] Assumes Flue Gas Desulphurisation (FGD) fitted to conventional systems, PFBC and Hybrid Cycles Gasifier + PFBC technology.
Source:
IEA Coal Research unpublished report ("Greenhouse gas emission factors for coal"—expected to be published in 1997).

Coal Subsidies

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she plans to meet her German counterpart to explain the environmental advantage of reducing and then eliminating subsidies on coal. [2671]

Mr. Battle: I have noted with concern a report by the World Bank indicating that subsidies for coal in the OECD area are associated with 1.5 per cent. of the total CO_2 emissions. German subsidies account for the bulk of this. I mean to press for the elimination of all coal subsidies throughout the European coal and steel community by the time the ECSC is wound up in 2002, and I will support the Commission vigorously in ensuring progressive reduction in state aid paid to the European coal industry over this period.

It is not our policy to subsidise UK coal producers, nor to tolerate subsidised imports into the UK, whether from Germany or elsewhere. UK coal is by far the lowest cost coal produced within the ECSC, and is generally accepted as the only ECSC production with a long-term prospect of viability. I am therefore concerned that UK coal exports should not be disadvantaged over the period to 2002 by subsidies given to other ECSC producers; and we will press the Commission to deny approval to such state aids, unless arrangements have first been put in place for removing any consequential market distortions against UK coal available for sale within the ECSC.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to extend the non-fossil fuel obligation so that it is available to subsidise fossil fuels. [2672]

Mr. Battle: I am currently considering the options for the longer term future of the NFFO, and I will make a further announcement in due course. Extending the scope of NFFO to include other forms of energy would need primary legislation and clearance from the European Commission.

Commercial Debt

Mr. Cotter: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to protect small businesses against the late payment of commercial debt. [2637]

Mrs. Roche: The Government will introduce a comprehensive range of measures to address the late payment of commercial debt. These will include the introduction of legislation giving businesses a statutory right to claim interest on late payment of commercial debt, a review of the company reporting requirements and a requirement that Government Departments and local authorities pay their bills on time.

Nuclear Fuel

Mr. Flynn: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what tonnage of spent nuclear fuel elements has been reprocessed each year at *(a)* Sellafield and *(b)* Dounreay, listing the (i) initial uranium enrichment and spent fuel burn up rate composition and (ii) reactor and country origin, in each case since these plants became operational. [1844]

Mr. Battle *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* Reprocessing operations are carried out at Sellafield by British Nuclear Fuels plc (BNFL) and at Dounreay by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA). Since reprocessing operations began at Sellafield nearly 40 years ago, a total of around 40,000 tonnes of spent fuel have been reprocessed. Customers for spent fuel reprocessed at Sellafield are from the UK, Germany, Japan, Switzerland, Sweden, Spain, Netherlands, Canada and Italy. Information on the initial uranium enrichment and spent fuel burn up rate composition and reactor origin,

since these plants became operational, can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I have asked the Chairman of the UKAEA to provide the corresponding information in respect of Dounreay.

HEALTH

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been commissioned, what estimates have been made by his department and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the national health service of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2104]

Mr. Milburn: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 9 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *310*.

Eye Tests (Changes)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations he has received concerning the effect of eye test charges on the incidence of eye disease; [2390]

(2) if he will abolish charges for eye tests; and if he will make a statement. [2389]

Mr. Milburn: The Royal National Institute for the Blind has sent us a report of a survey which suggests that, since 1988, people have been having their eyes tested at less frequent intervals.

Since 1989 the availability of free National Health Service sight tests has been restricted to children, people on low incomes and people at particular risk of eye disease. We will be reviewing these arrangements.

Paramedics (Voluntary Work)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidance to national health service ambulance trusts in respect of paramedics carrying out voluntary work with the British Red Cross in their spare time. [2359]

Mr. Milburn: We have no plans to issue such guidance. Matters of this kind are between the trust concerned and its employees at a local level.

High Dependency Beds

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many high dependency unit beds there are in *(a)* Hartlepool General Hospital, *(b)* Dryburn Hospital and *(c)* Sunderland Royal Hospital. [2459]

Mr. Milburn: The "Bed availability for England" book, copies of which are available in the Library, contains information by individual National Health Service providers, i.e., trusts, directly managed units and the special health authorities with summary tables for England. Data are collected by broad ward classification rather than by clinical specialty. Although the broad ward classification—"General Patients—Other ages—intensive" may include high dependency unit beds it is not possible to identify these separately. Returns are made on a financial year basis and the latest year for which data are available is 1995–96.

Following a review of central requirements, the return was changed for 1996–97 to collect information on the number of beds *(a)* available and *(b)* occupied. Figures from this new return will be published for the first time later this year.

Water Fluoridation

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons for continuing to allow the fluoridation of water in some parts of the United Kingdom. [2365]

Mr. Milburn: The overwhelming weight of medical, dental and scientific opinion throughout the world considers water fluoridation, at the optimum level of 1 part per million in temperate climates, to be a safe and effective means of reducing dental decay, particularly among children.

Mobile Phones and Electric Blankets (Health Risks)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment his Department has made of the potential health risks posed by mobile phone usage; and if he will make a statement; [2723]

(2) what assessment he has made of the possible health risks connected to the use of electric blankets; and if he will make a statement. [2710]

Ms Jowell: The Department obtains advice from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) on the risks to health of exposure to electromagnetic fields.

The NRPB's advice is based on its own careful assessment of published scientific studies and those carried out by the World Health Organisation, by the NRPB Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation, under the chairmanship of Professor Sir Richard Doll, and by the International Commission on Non-ionising Radiation.

The NRPB's advice is that there is no convincing scientific evidence that exposure to microwave radiation associated with mobile phone and electric blanket usage is harmful to human health.

Medical Drug Donations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which 10 developing countries received the greatest quantities of medicinal drug donations from United Kingdom companies and charities for *(a)* emergency relief and *(b)* general medicinal use in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement; [2728]

(2) what estimate she has made of the number of tonnes of medicinal drugs donated to developing countries *(a)* directly by pharmaceutical companies and *(b)* via charities each year for (i) emergency relief and (ii) general medicinal use; and if he will make a statement; [2727]

(3) what estimate he has made of the total numbers of charitable organisations and commercial bodies which donate medicinal drugs to *(a)* the Baltic states, *(b)* Haiti, *(c)* Africa and *(d)* Romania. [2756]

Ms Jowell: We do not hold information on the numbers of charities and companies who make drug donations nor on the types or volume of drugs donated.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to meet United States representatives to discuss the provision of tax incentives for firms donating medicinal drugs to developing countries; and if he will make a statement. [2691]

Ms Jowell: None.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the World Health Organisations's guidelines on drug donations; and what proposals he has to improve them; [2757]

(2) what plans he has to implement the World Health Organisation's guidelines on drug donations to third world and former eastern bloc countries. [2758]

Ms Jowell: The Government supports the World Health Organisations's Guidelines for drug donations, which were published in May 1996. These give advice to both donating and recipient member states on safety, quality, and labelling. The United Kingdom pharmaceutical industry is aware of the WHO guidelines. The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain also provides similar guidance to its members on redirection of medicines overseas.

The UK currently holds the chair of the WHO's Drugs Action Programme Management Advisory Committee which regularly reviews progress on implementation of the guidelines and assess the need for improvements.

Dental Services

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he had made of the numbers of dental patients who have not used their dentist for two years or more and have subsequently *(a)* been deregistered by their local dental board and *(b)* been charged a £30 emergency fee before any new treatment and reregistration; and by what method patients are informed of the imposition of that charge. [2307]

Mr. Milburn: In 1996–97 4.1 million adult registrations lapsed automatically after a period of two years during which the patient had not attended a dentist. There is no National Health Service charge for registering or re-registering with a dentist.

Cannabis

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to allow trials of cannabis sativa in the treatment of multiple sclerosis, glaucoma, cerebral palsy and nausea caused by chemotherapy. [2263]

Ms Jowell: Misuse of drugs legislation allows for research involving cannabis under Home Office licence. Any proposed clinical trial would have to be submitted to the Medicines Control Agency for approval on exemption in accordance with the Medicines Act 1968. Any application for a licence or a certificate, or both, would be carefully considered.

HIV/AIDS

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what additional funding for HIV/AIDS therapy has been allocated in light of the increased availability of more effective HIV/AIDS drug treatments; and if he will make a statement; [2432]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure full availability of combination therapies, counselling services, dietetic treatments, in-patient services, psychiatric support in the community and district nurse services and other necessary services for HIV/AIDS patients; and if he will make a statement. [2436]

Ms Jowell: The Department has allocated a total of £199.6 million for HIV/AIDS treatment and care in 1997–98. This represents a seven per cent. increase over the allocation for 1996–97 as a contribution towards new combination therapies and the Department is keeping in close touch with health authorities, clinicians and others on developments in this area and the costs and benefits associated with them.

The treatment and care budget, which is allocated to health authorities in line with the number of AIDS cases, is intended to cover services for people with HIV and AIDS as determined through local needs assessment and priorities.

Health Authority Deficit

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* health trusts and *(b)* health authorities in England were in deficit on 1 April 1996; and by what amounts. [2755]

Mr. Milburn: The details of all trusts' 1995–96 Income and Expenditure positions drawn from audited accounts is available in the Library. Information on 1995–96 district health authorities' Income and Expenditure positions also drawn from audited accounts have been placed in the Library. Due to a different accounting basis these figures are not directly comparable with those placed in the Library on 2 June which provided information relating to 1996–97.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is the policy of Ministers to exclude clinical services from the PFI in all circumstances. [2494]

Mr. Milburn: Clinical services should not be included as part of a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme.

NHS Trusts (Appointments)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what date he intends to reappoint the membership of the boards of *(a)* West Cumbria Health Care Trust, *(b)* the north Cumbria Health Care Authority and *(c)* the Cumbria Ambulance Trust. [2495]

Mr. Milburn: The terms of appointment of those appointed to these boards are as follows:

	Appointed from	*Appointed to*
West Cumbria Health Care NHS Trust		
Eric Urquhart (Chairman)	1 November 1996	31 October 2000
David Gill	1 November 1996	31 October 1998

	Appointed from	Appointed to
Ronald Inglis	1 November 1996	31 October 2000
Graham Lamont	1 November 1996	31 October 2000
Claire Madden	1 November 1994	31 October 1998
Effie Graham	1 November 1996	31 October 1998
Cumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust		
James Howard (Chairman)	15 April 1996	31 October 1999
Fiona Cartmell	1 November 1996	31 October 2000
Brian Clayton	1 November 1996	31 October 2000
Peter Simpson	1 November 1994	31 October 1998
Barbara Stephens	1 November 1996	31 October 2000
North Cumbria Health Authority		
Ian Carr (Chairman)	1 April 1996	31 March 1998
John Chipps	1 April 1996	31 March 2000
Jean Gray	1 April 1996	31 March 2000
Ruth Popple	1 April 1996	31 March 2000
Paul Groom	1 April 1996	31 March 1998
Lynne Quinion	1 April 1996	31 March 1998

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many appointments to boards of NHS trusts are due to be made in the next round of reappointments. [2496]

Mr. Milburn: The total number of National Health Service trust board appointments due in the 1997 round is 910, comprising 149 chairman appointments and 761 non-executive directors. In addition, there are 73 current vacancies to be filled.

Aluminium (Health Risks)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the possible health risks connected to the use of aluminium containers; and if he will make a statement. [2711]

Ms Jowell: Dietary survey data indicate that the intake of aluminium in the United Kingdom, which includes the contribution from aluminium containers, is well within international safety limits.

Smoking

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of adult *(a)* men and *(b)* women in the United Kingdom are cigarette smokers, in each 10 year age band; and if he will make a statement. [2713]

Ms Jowell: Estimates of the number and percentage of adult men and women cigarette smokers in England 1994 are shown in the table. Questions relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively.

Cigarette smoking amongst adults, by age and gender
England 1994

Percentage/numbers

	Men		Women	
Age	Percentage of smokers	Estimated number of cigarette smokers	Percentage of smokers	Estimated number of cigarette smokers
16 to 24	36	1,056,000	34	940,000
25 to 34	34	1,368,000	30	1,140,000
35 to 44	34	1,103,000	28	908,000
45 to 54	26	792,000	28	856,000
55 to 64	23	547,000	22	538,000
65 to 74	18	363,000	19	459,000
75 and over	13	148,000	8	167,000
All persons	28	5,237,000	25	5,019,000

1. The percentages have been calculated from the ONS General Household Survey 1993–94.

2. The number of smokers has been estimated using Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates as at 30 June 1994, and the percentage of smokers.

3. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole figure. The estimates of the number of smokers have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals his Department has to collect centrally the numbers of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease. [2714]

Mr. Boateng: We have no plans to collect this information centrally. It is estimated that there are currently around 600,000 sufferers of dementia in England.

National Health Service (Primary Care) Act

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to amend the National Health Service (Primary Care) Act 1997; and if he will make a statement. [2831]

Mr. Milburn: We are currently considering the development of primary care services including implementation of the National Health Service (Primary Care) Act 1997. No final decisions have yet been reached.

Emergency Readmissions

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for *(a)* the South East Thames regional health authority, *(b)* the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority and *(c)* each of the NHS trusts operating within the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority area (1) the number of emergency readmissions within 28 days for the periods (i) 1 April 1995 to 30 September 1995, (ii) 1 October 1995 to 31 March 1996, (iii) 1 April 1996 to 30 September 1996 and (iv) 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997 and (2) the figures in (1) above expressed as a percentage of the total number of operations carried out. [2832]

Mr. Milburn: Since April 1996 the National Health Service Executive has collected information on patients aged 75 and over who are readmitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge, for all specialties except

psychiatry, by health authority. The information for East Sussex, Brighton and Hove Health Authority is as follows:

East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	*1 April 1996 to 30 September 1996*	*1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997*
Readmissions within 28 days	728	928
Live discharges	16,756	16,190
Readmissions/discharges	4.3 per cent.	5.7 per cent.

Source:
NHS quarterly monitoring returns table QMX7, lines 03 and 05.

At present the NHS Executive only collects data on emergency readmissions within 28 days for patients aged 75 and over.

(The hon. Member may wish to contact the health authorities and trusts directly to enquire whether the information is collected locally).

Carers

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he intends to insure that carers are aware of their rights under the Carers Recognition and Services Act 1995. [2872]

Mr. Boateng: The Department's Guidance and Practice Guide on implementing the Act require social services departments to ensure that their published information on community care tells carers about their rights under the Act.

Information should be available to carers when they need it; it should be accessible to all members of the community and easy to understand. It should also be part of routine assessment practice and, specifically, authorities are expected to inform carers who appear to be eligible under the Act of their right to request an assessment.

As part of our programme of research on community care, we are considering the impact of the Act. An inspection by the Social Services Inspectorate is also in preparation, which will look at how local authorities are implementing the Act.

Private Finance Initiative

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Private Finance Initiative in the national health service. [2814]

Mr. Milburn: I intend to undertake an urgent exercise to prioritise all the major Private Finance Initiative (PFI) schemes in the acute sector. I have today written to all Members, giving full details of the steps I intend to take and setting out the way forward for the PFI in the National Health Service.

The need to prioritise the schemes currently battling for the limited private and public sector resources is now understood and accepted. Only if resources are concentrated on those schemes with the greatest need will real progress be made and schemes delivered.

The prioritisation exercise will cover all the major acute schemes on the current project list that have an approved Outline Business Case. They will be given separate gradings regarding health service need, how well the scheme fits with the PFI process and hence its likelihood of delivering a successful outcome, and how far and well negotiations have progressed.

The health service need will consider the service's own assessment of the medical and estates reasons for completing the scheme.

The fit and deliverability (or PFI-ability) of the scheme will evaluate if the scheme is one that is likely to prove attractive to the private sector. Too many inherently unsuitable schemes were forced to test for PFI and we must not be seen to be unnecessarily prolonging that process.

The third criteria will be how well and far negotiations have progressed. If we are to concentrate resources on the leading schemes, it is clearly a nonsense to allow the system to become further clogged by new schemes entering the process. Equally, many schemes have become stalled because the system is overloaded and these cannot be left to stagnate.

Performance of each of the schemes against these criteria will form the basis for the selection of the schemes that will proceed. Final announcements regarding the fate of all the schemes will be made at the end of June. During this time, I am making myself available to receive representations from constituency members. No final decision will be taken on any of the schemes without Members having had the opportunity to personally represent their own and their constituents' wishes. The prioritisation exercise is going to be fair and genuine.

There will be a separate exercise for London PFI schemes arising from our Review of health services in the capital which will be announced in due course.

Those schemes that fail to make the list, for whatever reason, will be prioritised nationally alongside schemes that are competing for the limited public capital we have. We will only invite competition for the schemes that have a genuine health need and can be delivered.

In conjunction with this work on prioritisation, I will be looking over the coming months at improving the PFI product in terms of fostering innovation; resolving affordability and delivering PFI solutions in non-acute fields like primary care and mental health. In addition, I will also be looking, more fundamentally, at developing other possible models of structuring private finance schemes in the longer term.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the MAFF budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2107]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 9 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *310*, by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade.

BSE

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimates have been drawn to his attention as to the cost to the meat industry of BSE. [2798]

Mr. Rooker: There have been several studies which have addressed certain aspects of the costs of BSE, but I am not aware of any estimates of the total cost to the meat industry. However, the Ministry has commissioned an independent study to provide a comprehensive assessment of the economic impact of BSE across the whole UK economy and within particular regions. The study is expected to be completed during September 1997.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what extent the selective cull is required in order to meet the target date of 2001 in terms of BSE eradication. [2801]

Mr. Rooker: The year 2001 is not a target date for BSE eradication, but an estimate of the time when the BSE epidemic will have reached insignificant levels based on research carried out by Professor Anderson of Oxford University and his team, in collaboration with Wilesmith and others at VLA and published in Nature, volume 382. The purpose of the selective cull is to accelerate the rate of decline in the epidemic by removing animals which are likely to become BSE cases and to comply with the pre-conditions of the Florence Agreement made in June 1996.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will consult food consumer groups on the case for a judicial inquiry into the handling of the BSE crisis. [2799]

Mr. Rooker: I intend to have close contacts with consumer groups, and will be happy to hear their views on all aspects of the BSE crisis, including the case for an inquiry.

Ruminant Feed

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence has been drawn to the attention of his Department that ruminant feed is being fed to pigs, poultry, lamb and fish. [2797]

Mr. Rooker: We have received no evidence that feed intended for ruminants is being fed to pigs, poultry and fish. As ruminants, lambs receive ruminant feed.

Lacto-vegetarians and Vegans

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has of the percentage of the UK population currently *(a)* lacto-vegetarian and *(b)* vegan; and if he will make a statement. [2712]

Mr. Rooker: Data collected as part of a recent MAFF-funded survey of the diets of vegetarians suggested that approximately 2 per cent. of the population of Great Britain aged 15 and over are vegetarian, a further 3 per cent. consider themselves to be vegetarians but also eat fish, and 0.3 per cent. are vegan. We do not have equivalent figures for the UK, nor any readily available information on the percentage of the population who are lacto-vegetarian.

SOCIAL SECURITY

State Retirement Pensions (Overseas Residents)

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when she plans to introduce proposals on the uprating of state retirement pensions to people resident abroad; and if she will make a statement. [583]

Mr. Denham: State Retirement Pensions are uprated within the European Economic Area and in certain countries with which the United Kingdom has a Social Security agreement which provides for uprating.

The Government has no plans at present to introduce proposals on the uprating of pensions paid to people living in other countries. There are competing demands and constraints on Social Security spending, and it would be wrong to raise expectations that uprating these pensions would be likely to attract priority under current circumstances.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to reform the jobseeker's allowance. [1466]

Mr. Bradley: Our Welfare to Work objectives are to provide work incentives, to reduce poverty and welfare dependency and to strike a new balance between rights and responsibilities. As the main benefit for the unemployed, Jobseeker's Allowance will have a major role to play in the transition from benefit to work, and an extensive programme of monitoring and evaluation is under way to enable us to ensure that it is achieving these objectives.

In addition to this major evaluation exercise, we shall also keep the individual benefit rules under consideration as we develop our plans.

Departmental Computer Systems

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to ensure that her Department's computer systems are millennium compliant; and if she will make a statement. [1243]

Mr. Bradley: The Department's main computer systems have been fully analysed for Year 2000 compliance. Plans to complete the necessary changes are being implemented. All the major benefit and recording computer systems supporting the day-to-day delivery of Social Security will be amended by the end of 1998 to permit a full year's processing before the year 2000.

Analysis is continuing to assess the year 2000 implications for the Department's administrative, support and non IT systems.

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by what means her Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1667]

Mr. Frank Field: The Department and its agencies makes its publications in Braille, audio cassette and large print available by various means.

"A Catalogue of leaflets, posters, and information" (CAT 1) fully lists the Departmental information that is available in alternative formats and a copy has been sent to the hon. Member. This is mailed out to 90,000 intermediaries and advisers annually. Additionally, a Benefits Agency quarterly newsletter, Touchbase, mailed to these advisers, includes advertising on the availability of these products.

Information regarding alternative formats can also be obtained through the various Departmental help lines. The lines themselves are publicised widely through intermediaries, telephone directories, CAT 1, local offices and advertising and direct marketing campaigns.

Benefits Agency information in braille and on audio cassettes is also available from the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) which also lists BA products in their magazines such as Spotlight, Welcome to a World of:, New Beacon and The Bibliography Reading List.

The Benefits Agency is also represented at exhibitions such as Naidex, Nacab and Vision '97 where alternative formats are always made available. Also the Department liaises with employers, intermediaries and advisers, often through mailings, to make them aware of new publications which may be relevant to their employees, clients and customers.

Information about alternative formats is also available from all local Social Security offices.

State Pension

Mr. Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has to amend the rules with regard to downrating of the state retirement pension for pensioners who are in hospital for six weeks or more. [2499]

Mr. Denham: Most Social Security benefits, including Retirement Pension, are reduced after a period in hospital. These rules have been applied, with only minor modifications, since the introduction of the National Insurance scheme on the basis that State funds should not make double provision for the same needs. There are no plans to amend these rules.

Old Age Pension

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will review the 25 pence per week additional payment for the over 80-year-olds. [2500]

Mr. Denham: We will examine means of delivering more automatic help to the poorest pensioners, many of whom are over 80. We will also retain the basic state pension as the foundation of pension provision and increase its value at least in line with prices.

Second-tier Pension

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's plans to establish a state second-tier pension. [2501]

Mr. Denham: We will be setting up a review of the central areas of insecurity for the elderly which will cover second tier pensions including SERPS. We intend to retain SERPS for those who wish to remain in it and will seek to develop the administrative structure of SERPS so as to create a "citizenship pension" for those who assume responsibility as carers and as a result lose out on the pension entitlements they would otherwise acquire.

We will also be developing a new framework of stakeholder pensions to provide value for money, flexible and secure second pensions particularly for those on low and modest incomes, with changing patterns of employment, and who cannot join an employee occupational scheme. These will be based on new partnerships between financial service companies, employers and employees.

Housing Benefit (Single People)

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will withdraw the regulations on housing benefit for single people aged 25 to 60 years which were announced on 26 November 1996. [2833]

Mr. Bradley: Measures to restrict Housing Benefit for single people under the age of 60 were inherited from the previous administration and the reduction in expenditure this entails form part of Departmental expenditure plans. We are reviewing those plans and will announce our decision shortly.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Hanson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the current status of the document, "Benefits Agency (Wales), the Blueprint for the Future"; and what assessment she has made of its proposals. [2839]

Mr. Field: The "Benefits Agency Wales—Blueprint for the Future" consultation document was published on 15 November 1996 and the period of public consultation was extended to 28 February 1997. Representations received during the consultation period will be considered by Ministers in due course, and announcements will be made in the light of these considerations.

These representations will be considered by Ministers in due course, and announcements will be made in the light of these considerations.

We will be assessing our proposals in the light of this document, and also each of the proposed Benefits Agency initiatives which are part of the Department's current programme to ensure that they will provide the improved services, better security and value for money that we want to see in a modernised Social Security system.

Announcements will be made in due course.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Publications

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means her Department makes available its publications in *(a)* Braille, *(b)* audio tape and *(c)* large print; and how this is publicised. [1663]

Mr. Worthington: The Department of Health and Social Services has adopted a policy that all documents addressed to the workforce or the public should be in a reasonably large font and should also be considered for publication in alternative formats such as Braille, large print, audio or video tape.

All published documents contact information on the availability of the document in alternative formats.

The Department also works closely with the appropriate voluntary bodies in the drafting and distribution of material published in alternative formats.

Sewers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to install main sewers at Derryboye crossroads near Saintfield, Co. Down.[1933]

Mr. Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Water Service under its Chief Executive, Mr. H. R. F. Plester. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from H. R. F. Plester to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 5 June 1997:

Lord Dubs has asked me to reply to your parliamentary question asking what plans Water Service has to install main sewers at Derryboye crossroads near Saintfield, Co Down.

Water Service has no plans to install a sewerage system at this location. It does, however, provide a septic tank desludging service which is available to rural householders in such circumstances.

Secret Societies

Mr. Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when she plans to legislate to require *(a)* police officers, *(b)* members of the judiciary and magistrates, *(c)* counsel and solicitors, *(d)* CPS prosecutors, *(e)* probation and *(f)* prison officers to disclose publicly their membership of secret societies. [1919]

Mr. Ingram: There are no present plans to so legislate.

The Home Affairs Committee Report on Freemasonry in the Police and the Judiciary was published in March this year. Mr right hon. Friend, the Minister of State at the Home Office has recently advised the clerk of the Committee that the issues in the report are being addressed in consultation with other Departments, including the Northern Ireland Office, with the aim of making a substantive response by the end of August.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to require secret societies to publish registers of their members; what assessment she has made of the potential threat to members of such societies from the publication of such registers; and if she will make a statement. [1920]

Mr. Ingram: There are no plans to require secret societies to publish registers of their members. Consequently there has been no assessment made of the potential threat to members of such societies from the publication of such registers.

SPARD Scheme

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the last payments on the SPARD scheme will be issued to farmers. [2016]

Mr. Murphy: The Department has approved projected expenditure by farmers in the SPARD Scheme up to 31 March 1999 and to the extent that the projects are carried out and translate into actual claims, final payments will be made by that date.

Abbatoir (Saintfield)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will order a public inquiry into the application for an abbatoir at Saintfield Livestock Market; and if she will commission an environmental impact statement in accordance with the Environmental Effects Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1989. [2017]

Mr. Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Planning Service under its Chief Executive, Mr. T. W. Stewart. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from T. W. Stewart to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 6 June 1997:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about a Public Inquiry and the commissioning of an environmental impact statement in relation to a planning application for an abbatoir at Saintfield Livestock Mart.

This planning application, which was received in April 1997, has been the subject of a large number of objections. The Department determined that the proposal fell within the scope of Category 7(f) of Schedule 2 of the Environmental Effects Regulations (NI) 1989 and the applicant was requested to submit an Environmental Statement on 2 May 1997. The applicant had until 30 May 1997 to confirm acceptance or appeal against this determination. There has been no appeal lodged and the applicant must now either submit the Environmental Statement or withdraw the application.

If an Environmental Statement is submitted it will be publicly advertised and all interested parties will have an opportunity to make representations. A decision on the way forward, including the need for a Public Inquiry, can only be taken once the Environmental Statement has been received and the consultative responses have been fully considered. It is unlikely that any decision on the need for a Public Inquiry will be taken until Autumn 1997, at the earliest.

I do hope you find this helpful and I will, of course, let you know once a decision on the way forward has been taken.

Housing Development (Newtownards)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment her Department has made of the wildlife effects of an application to build three houses at 55 Crawfordsburn Road, Newtownard, upon the area known as the Golden Glen. [2018]

Mr. Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Environment and Heritage Service under its chief executive, Mr. Robert Martin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from J. S. Faulkner to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 4 June 1997:

As Chief Executive of Environment and Heritage Service (EHS), Mr. Robert Martin is responsible for all operational aspects of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland's environmental policies. On his behalf I am responding to the Parliamentary Question which you put down in the House of Commons on Wednesday, 4 June 1997, regarding the impact on wildlife of a planning application to build 3 houses at 55 Crawfordsburn Road, Newtownards.

I wish to confirm that the application submitted for development at the above location was passed for comment by Planning Service to Environment and Heritage Service. After consideration of the content of the application EHS is of the opinion that the proposal

will have no direct impact on the nature conservation value of the Golden Glen. Development does not extend down to the edge of the pond and the majority of the woodland will be retained undisturbed. As a safeguard however, although no signs of badger activity were noted in the areas to be impacted by development, EHS will recommend to Planning Service that a badger survey be undertaken by a recognised expert.

I trust you will find this reply helpful.

Pedestrian Crossing (Newtownards)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what plans she has to install a pedestrian crossing at the junction of the Bangor and Belvedere Roads in Newtownards; and if she will commission a study of the demand for such a crossing; [2020]

(2) how many accidents have been reported at or around the Ballymacbrennan crossroads of the Saintfield and Comber Roads in the last five years; and what plans she has *(a)* to erect warning signs and *(b)* to use traffic management devices to slow traffic on the Comber Road at this point. [1921]

Mr. Murphy: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Roads Service and its Chief Executive, Mr. W. J. McCowbrey. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 6 June 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your recently tabled PQ about the need for a pedestrian crossing at the Bangor Road/Belvedere Road junction, Newtownards.

Roads Service is not aware of any problems at this location. However, a survey to determine whether there is a need for a crossing will be carried out within the next few weeks. The Divisional Roads Manager, Mr McCandless, will write to you as soon as the outcome is known.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Letter from W. J. McCoubrey to Mr. John D. Taylor, dated 6 June 1997:

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has asked me to reply to your recently tabled PQ about the Ballymacbrennan crossroads of the Saintfield and Comber Roads.

I have been informed by the RUC Central Statistics Unit that in the past 5 years (1992–1996 inclusive) there have been 4 personal injury accidents at this location. As existing signs and road layout are considered adequate there are no proposals to erect additional signs or to introduce any traffic management measures.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Housing Executive

Mr. Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to introduce provisions analogous to those contained in the Local Government Finance (Supplementary Credit Approvals) Bill to enable the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to expand its activities; and if she will make a statement. [1914]

Mr. Murphy: There is no need to introduce similar provisions. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive presently uses its housing capital receipts, including those from house sales, as an alternative to fresh borrowing to fund its capital works programmes.

Mr. Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she plans to proceed with proposals to subject Northern Ireland Housing Executive functions to compulsory competitive tendering; and if she will make a statement. [1918]

Mr. Murphy: The Government is committed to replacing compulsory competitive tendering with a duty on local authorities to achieve best value. I hope to make an announcement soon on the application of the best value approach for Housing Executive functions.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Anniversary

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which right hon. and hon. Members from Northern Ireland constituencies were invited to the service in St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast to mark the 75th Anniversary of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. [2144]

Mr. Ingram: This is a matter for the Chief Constable. However, I understand that invitations to attend the service in St. Anne's Cathedral were extended to the leaders of the following Northern Ireland political parties: Ulster Unionist Party (Mr. David Trimble), Democratic Unionist Party (Rev. Dr. Ian Paisley), Social Democratic and Labour Party (Mr. John Hume), UK Unionist Party (Mr. Robert McCartney) and the Alliance Party (Lord Alderdice).

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by her Department and what information presented to her, regarding the costs per annum to the Northern Ireland Department's budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if she will make a statement. [2114]

Mr. Murphy: The Secretary of State has not specifically commissioned work on levels of minimum pay. However officials do address a range of pay scenarios during pay negotiations. As part of this year's pay negotiations the Trade Union has lodged a claim for a minimum wage of £4.42 per hour and officials calculate the cost of this for the non-industrial civil service to be in the region of £5 million. Calculations were also undertaken on the basis of £4 per hour and this would result in an additional cost in the region of £2.5 million.

United States (Discussions)

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will list the names of those American politicians with whom she had discussions about the future of Northern Ireland on her recent visit to the United States. [2132]

Dr. Mowlam: During my visit to Washington, I had the opportunity to discuss a number of issues relating to Northern Ireland with various members of the House International Relations Committee, including Congressmen Benjamin Gilman (Chairman), Peter King, Richard Neal and Tom Manton; and with Senators Edward Kennedy, Christopher Dodd, Patrick Leahy and Joseph P. Kennedy II.

In addition I also had productive meetings with various representatives of the US Administration, including officials from the National Security Council, and the US Department of Commerce.

Occupational Therapy

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps will be taken to reduce the backlog of occupational therapist referrals; and if she will make a statement. [2166]

Mr. Worthington: Demand for occupational therapy assessments is rising as increasing numbers of dependent people opt to live in their own homes. The Department of Health and Social Services has been working closely with the Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts and, in the case of housing adaptation assessments with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, to streamline procedures. Service level agreements are being put in place and a list of minor adaptations not requiring occupational therapy input has been agreed. I have asked the Boards to identify, as a matter of urgency, what further steps they can take to reduce waiting lists.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 11 June 1997

SCOTLAND

Disabled People

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will appoint a Minister to have responsibility for policy on disabled people. [2291]

Mr. Galbraith: My Ministerial responsibilities include disability issues and I will be working with Ministerial colleagues to ensure that all the needs of all disabled people are addressed.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to allow Scottish Homes tenants the option of a local authority landlord in the event of a housing stock transfer. [2479]

Mr. Chisholm: We are reviewing the arrangements for the transfer of Scottish Homes' houses in the light of the Government's commitment to give tenants choice in their landlord.

Homelessness

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to tackle homelessness in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [2724]

Mr. Chisholm: A revised Code of Guidance on Homelessness will shortly be issued. It will give clear encouragement to local authorities that they should seek to secure, either at their own hand or from other housing providers, permanent rather than temporary accommodation for unintentionally homeless people in priority need. We have also allocated an additional £1 million for the Rough Sleepers Initiative this year, bringing the total available funding to £16 million over three years; and we are making available a further £2 million as the first instalment in a new long term initiative to bring empty homes back into use. Subject to a satisfactory evaluation, we will make additional funding available to the Scottish Homeless Advisory Service to extend it throughout Scotland.

Poverty

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to tackle poverty in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [2725]

Mr. Chisholm: The Government are committed to mounting a concerted attack against the multiple causes of social and economic decline. For many, the best path out of poverty is work, where it is appropriate. Our New Deal initiative will give young people opportunities to do so as part of our Welfare to Work programme. We also intend to provide help for people over the age of 25 who have been out of work for 2 years or more.

The Government's commitment is not restricted to those seeking work, but to all of the most deprived in our society. A significant way in which this is taken forward in areas with the worst concentrations of deprivation is through the multi-agency partnership approach to regeneration, established under Programme for Partnership, where comprehensive strategies are taken forward to improve the conditions in which local people live.

Islay (Air Services)

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total subsidy for air services to Islay in *(a)* 1995 and *(b)* 1996; to which company the subsidy was awarded; and what obligations are placed on the company to run weekend services. [2855]

Mr. Chisholm: No subsidy is provided by either central or local government for scheduled air services to and from Islay.

Pennington Report

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response the Government have made to the recommendations of the Pennington report. [3509]

Mr. Dewar: The Government accept all the recommendations in the final Pennington Report. We are fully committed to introducing the measures which we believe will help strengthen existing food safety legislation.

Central to the Pennington Report are the recommendations to license butchers who are handling raw and cooked meat to ensure adequate separation. The Government are actively considering the detail of these proposals and will shortly seek views from health professionals, consumer organisations and the trade on issues such as the premises to be covered, the degree of physical separation and on timescale for implementation. Final decisions on all these matters will have as its overriding concern the protection of public health.

The Government will also promote the introduction of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles into the meat production chain, from slaughterhouse to butcher shop. This internationally recognised approach to identifying and controlling food hazards will secure improved levels of food safety in the longer term.

As Professor Pennington has recognised, many of the recommendations will require careful development to ensure that they are effective when introduced. At the same time we are fully aware of the need to have the measures in place quickly to strengthen food safety and restore public confidence, particularly given the recent new outbreaks of E.coli in Scotland.

Finally, the Government wish formally to record its appreciation of the work carried out by Professor Pennington and the members of the expert group. Our acceptance of all the Group's recommendations illustrates our commitment that the safety of public health will be of the highest priority.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Closed Circuit Television (Chelmsford)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the impact of the introduction of CCTV on the crime level in the centre of Chelmsford; how many arrests have been made as a result of CCTV; and by how much the crime rate has fallen in that part of Chelmsford. [2251]

Mr. Michael: The police in Chelmsford report that, in the 12-month period since the cameras became operational (January 1996–January 1997), 200 arrests were directly attributed to the presence of the cameras, and town centre crime overall fell by 21 per cent.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2513]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department today.

Puppy Farms

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to increase animal welfare standards in puppy farms; and if he will make a statement. [2989]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government is giving careful consideration to the laws regulating dog breeding establishments.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of asylum seekers held *(a)* in gaol and *(b)* otherwise in custody on the first day of each month for the years (i) 1994, (ii) 1995, (iii) 1996 and (iv) 1997 to date. [2845]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The available information on detained asylum seekers for selected dates during 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997 is given in the table.

Table 1. Number of people recorded as being detained [1,2], who had sought asylum at some stage, by location of detention, as at selected dates in 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997.

Detained as at	Detained in Prison Service establishments	Detained in Other places of detention	Total
18 November 1994	278	376	654
13 January 1995	257	315	572
29 March 1995	274	345	619
10 May 1995	240	406	646
3 July 1995	323	367	690
21 November 1995	378	398	776
31 January 1996	432	301	733
29 February 1996	346	356	702
29 March 1996	344	341	685
30 April 1996	353	372	725

Table 1. Number of people recorded as being detained [1,2], who had sought asylum at some stage, by location of detention, as at selected dates in 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997.

Detained as at	Detained in Prison Service establishments	Detained in Other places of detention	Total
31 May 1996[3]	352	399	751
27 June 1996	351	421	772
30 July 1996[4]	340	436	776
4 September 1996	339	470	809
1 October 1996	343	521	864
5 November 1996	325	483	808
11 December 1996	292	462	754
31 January 1997[5]	324	444	768
27 March 1997	313	464	777
30 April 1997	298	499	797

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Persons detained solely under the powers contained in Schedules 2 or 3 of the Immigration Act 1971. In some cases the asylum application will have been lodged subsequent to the applicant being detained. The figures include both detained asylum applicants who applied at ports, and those detained in after-entry enforcement work and include those awaiting removal following refusal of asylum, as well as those whose applications were under consideration or subject to appeal.

[3] Port cases are as at 7 June 1996 and In-country cases are as at 31 May 1996.

[4] Port cases are as at 2 August 1996 and In-country cases are as at 30 July 1996.

[5] Port cases are as at 3 February 1997 and In-country cases are as at 30 January 1997.

Immigration (Same Sex Partnerships)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will put on hold all immigration appeal cases for established same sex partnerships, pending a review of immigration policy. [3052]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No. Home Office Presenting Officers have, however, been instructed not to oppose requests for adjournments in same sex relationship appeals unless there are strong reasons on other grounds for proceeding with the case.

CS Gas

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to review the use of CS gas by the police; and if he will make a statement; [2138]

(2) what research his Department has commissioned into the effects of CS gas; and if he will make a statement; [2136]

(3) if he will make a statement on the regulations governing the use of CS gas by the police. [2137]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend has no plans to review police use of CS at this stage. In 1969, the then Home Secretary, my noble Friend Lord Callaghan, set up an inquiry into the medical and toxicological aspects of CS following its use in Londonderry. The report of the inquiry was published, in two parts, in 1969 and 1971 (Cm 4173 and Cm 4775 respectively). The possible use of CS cartridges and grenades by police forces as a last resort in dealing with serious disorder is the subject of confidential Home Office guidelines. The Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch reviewed all the available scientific data relating to CS which, along with advice from the Chief Medical Officer and the Ministry

of Defence, was taken into account by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in deciding to recommend CS spray as an aerosol incapacitant for police defensive use. ACPO has provided chief officers with guidance on the use of CS spray, copies of which are in the Library. The use of any force by officers is governed by section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967, which provides that a person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime.

Driving Without Insurance (Fines)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average fine imposed by *(a)* justices of the peace and *(b)* stipendiary and metropolitan stipendiary magistrates in relation to cases of driving with no insurance in each of the last three years. [2939]

Mr. Michael *[holding answer 10 June 1997]:* The information collected centrally does not allow a distinction to be made between the types of magistrates who deal with a case.

However, the following table shows the average fine imposed by all magistrates' courts for driving uninsured against third party risks in England and Wales in the years 1993, 1994 and 1995. Figures for 1996 are not yet available. It also shows separately figures for metropolitan police forces, where stipendiary and metropolitan stipendiary magistrates are most likely to operate, and other police forces. Those fined for driving without insurance are often dealt with for other offences as well. It is difficult to know whether there is a significant difference in the case profiles of offenders dealt with by courts in different areas.

Average fine in England and Wales for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks

	All magistrates' courts	*Magistrates' courts in metropolitan forces*	*Magistrates' courts in other police forces*
	(£)	*(£)*	*(£)*
1993	188	180	194
1994	209	205	212
1995	223	224	223

Animal Experimentation

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are to be taken to ensure proper observance of the regulations introduced under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [3005]

Mr. George Howarth: The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 remains one of the most rigorous pieces of legislation of its type. All those who work under the Act have a duty to ensure that its regulations, including the terms and conditions of the relevant licences and certificates, are fully observed. The holders of Certificates of Designation have a particular responsibility to ensure that animal work within their establishments is properly controlled.

The Home Office, through the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate, carries out spot checks on establishments to monitor compliance with the regulations, but inspectors cannot be at establishments at all times and observance of the law must lie primarily with the scientists and animal technicians.

James Hanratty

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to issue a pardon for James Hanratty. [2815]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend has no current plans to issue a pardon for James Hanratty. Representations on the case of James Hanratty have been passed to the Criminal Cases Review Commission for its consideration and it will be for it to decide if the case should be referred to the Court of Appeal.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to increase the percentage of *(a)* persons aged over 18 years, *(b)* people from ethnic minority backgrounds and *(c)* people in rented accommodation who are registered to vote. [3073]

Mr. George Howarth: We are considering how best to publicise this autumn's canvass for electoral registration and in particular how to reach groups whose members tend to be more likely not to register. These include the young, members of ethnic minority groups and people who are not in settled accommodation.

Entry Clearance Refusals (Appeals)

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average cost to public funds in the last year for which figures are available of an appeal to an adjudicator against a decision by an entry clearance officer to refuse family settlement to an applicant, from the time of the refusal to the issue of a determination by the adjudicator. [2531]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is not held centrally, but I will write to the hon. Member.

TREASURY

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2510]

Mrs. Liddell: No document falls due for transfer to the Public Record Office until it is 30 years old. The suitability of a document for selection for permanent preservation under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958 will be reviewed during that period. The Act does not require statistics to be kept in the form requested. To do so would incur disproportionate cost. However, in order to comply with their duties under the Act, Departments are obliged to make arrangements for the safe keeping of their records, with a view to their possible selection and transfer to the Public Record Office and

eventual release to the public. The general arrangements for extended closure or retention of public records are set out in Chapter 9 of the White Paper on Open Government of July 1993 (Cm 2290).

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the Government's proposals for the future of the private finance initiative; and if he will make a statement. [2569]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I have asked Malcolm Bates to conduct a rapid review of present arrangements. I have placed a copy of his terms of reference in the Library. Mr. Bates is due to report to me by 13 June, and I expect to announce the Government's response to the findings of that review shortly thereafter.

Terms of Reference

The purpose of the review, to be submitted to the Paymaster General by 13 June, is to make recommendations as to how best to accelerate the flow of sound PFI (Public/Private Partnership) projects. Taking as its starting point the 12 point plan for partnership, published originally in Labour's Business Manifesto, it will address in particular:

(i) The role that can best be played by a new public/private taskforce within the Treasury, reporting to the Paymaster General.

(ii) The respective roles and effectiveness of the Private Finance Panel, the Executive to the Private Finance Panel and the departmental officials active in advancing partnership projects across the public sector.

(iii) Generic obstacles to progress and recommendations for their removal in ways that maintain value for money as the litmus test for what is acceptable and what is not.

(iv) The extent to which a lack of skills in the public and private sectors is a barrier to progress and what could best address that.

(v) How best to learn the lessons of success (and failure) so that public and private sector practitioners do not constantly reinvent wheels.

Building Societies

Ms Keeble: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about Government policy on mutuality, with special reference to the Nationwide Building Society; and what assessment he has made of the possible impact on homeowners of building societies converting into banks. [2981]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government welcomes diversity and competition in the mortgage market, where both the mutual building societies and plc banks provide a range of varied and innovative products.

As only one building society has converted to a bank before this year, it is too early to say what the impact on homeowners will be.

Ms Drown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the long term impact *(a)* on interest rates for homeowners and savers and *(b)* on choice of lending and saving institutions, of mutual building societies converting into banks. [2985]

Mrs. Liddell: As all but one of the societies converting to banks are either about to do so, or have done so very recently, it is too early to say what the long term impact on interest rates for homeowners and savers will be.

The Government welcomes diversity and competition amongst lending and saving institutions, whatever their constitution.

Christian Aid: Change the Rules Campaign

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individual contributions of £1 coins the Treasury has received in the last 12 months from supporters of Christian Aid's Change the Rules campaign; and what he proposes to do with the sum contributed. [2837]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 10 June 1997]:* The Government has received a total of £3,624.67 as of 10 June. All the money received as part of the £1 coin campaign is being paid into the Consolidated Fund at the Bank of England and will be used to provide additional debt relief for Tanzania.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether NHS trust and health authority deficits, actual and projected, have been included in the public sector borrowing requirement calculation for *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97 and *(c)* 1997–98. [2207]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Outturns for the public sector borrowing requirement in 1995–97 and 1996–97 cover the cash borrowing requirements of all public sector bodies, including NHS Trusts and health authorities. The forecast of the public sector borrowing requirement for 1997–98 made in the last Budget was based on the previous Government's spending plans. It included the planned borrowing of NHS trusts and assumed that health authorities' expenditure remained within their allocated cash limit.

Income Tax

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for a married taxpayer with earned income and no other income of (i) £5,000, (ii) £10,000, (iii) £15,000 and (iv) £20,000 and a single taxpayer with earned income and no other income of *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £10,000 *(c)* £15,000 and *(d)* £20,000, how much they would gain each week from the introduction of a 10p starting rate of income tax on the first (1) £1,000, (2) £1,500, (3) £2,000, (4) £2,500 and (5) £3,000 of taxable income to replace the first £2,000 of the current 20p income tax band while leaving all other tax rate bands and allowances unchanged. [1859]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* Based on the right hon. Member's assumptions, the weekly gains from a new 10p starting rate of income tax are given in the table. 1997–98 allowances and rates are used.

Gain per week (£) Width of 10p band

Earnings	*£1,000*	*£1,500*	*£2,000*	*£2,500*	*£3,000*
£5,000	1.84	1.84	1.84	1.84	1.84
£10,000	1.92	2.88	3.85	4.81	5.77
£15,000	1.92	2.88	3.85	4.81	5.77
£20,000	1.92	2.88	3.85	4.81	5.77

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much reserve would be forgone by the introduction of a starting rate of income tax at 10p on the first *(a)* £1,000, *(b)* £1,500, *(c)* £2,000, *(d)* £2,500 and *(e)* £3,000 of taxable income to replace its first £1,000, £1,500, £2,000, £2,500, £3,000 respectively, of its current 20p income tax band, while leaving all other tax rate bands and allowances unchanged. [1860]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The estimated full-year costs, based on the right hon. Member's assumptions and assuming that all other allowances and tax rates in 1997–98 are left unchanged, are given in the table:

New 10p starting rate on first	*Full year cost at 1997–98 income levels (£ billion)*
£1,000	2.5
£1,500	3.6
£2,000	4.8
£2,500	5.9
£3,000	6.9

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with a starting rate of income tax at 10p on respectively the first £1,000, £1,500 to £2,000; £2,500, £3,000 of taxable income replacing the first £1,000, £1,500, £2,000, £2,500 and £3,000 of the current 20p income tax band, at what starting point of taxable income the basic rate would have to be set to ensure no overall loss of tax receipts either in the year of assessment for which these changes were made or in either of two following years. [1875]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* Based on the right hon. Member's assumption of no loss of tax revenue in a full year, the basic rate limit would need to be set at the levels given in the table. These assume 1997–98 income levels and that all other allowances and tax rates in 1997–98 are unchanged.

New 10p starting rate on first	*Value of basic rate limit*
£1,000	£21,100
£1,500	£19,400
£2,000	£18,000
£2,500	£16,850
£3,000	£15,850

To repeat the same analysis in terms of no overall loss of tax receipts in 1997–98 and the following two years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the basic rate limit would have to be reduced to ensure that with a starting rate of tax of 10p on the first *(a)* £1,000, *(b)* £1,500, *(c)* £2,000, *(d)* £2,500 and *(e)* £3,000 of taxable income to replace the first £1,000, £1,500, £2,000, £2,500 and £3,000 respectively, of the current 20p income tax band, while leaving all other tax rate bands and allowances unchanged, nobody currently paying tax at the higher rate of 40p would experience any reduction in their aggregate income tax liability. [1858]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* Based on the right hon. Member's assumptions that the higher rate taxpayers do not gain from a new 10p starting rate, the basic rate limit would be as shown in the table below.

Width of 10p band	*Reduce basic rate limit to*
(a) £1,000	£25,512
(b) £1,500	£25,218
(c) £2,000	£24,924
(d) £2,500	£24,629
(e) £3,000	£24,335

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of mortgage interest tax relief in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99 and *(c)* 1999–2000. [1642]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* The estimated total cost of mortgage interest tax relief in 1997–98 is £2.4 billion. The estimate is based on the assumption, by convention, of no change from the latest available estimated average building society interest rate of 6.66 per cent. The cost of the relief in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 would depend on future interest rates, the future distribution of the number and value of outstanding mortgages.

Finance Bill

Ms Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to publish the Finance Bill; and when he will make notes on the Bill's clauses available to hon. Members. [3506]

Mr. Gordon Brown: We expect the Finance Bill to be published the day after the conclusion of the Budget debate. Explanatory Notes on the Bill's clauses will be placed in the Vote Office and the Libraries of the House that day. Members of the public will be able to obtain copies of the Explanatory Notes from the Treasury; these will also be available on the Treasury's internet site (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk).

Customs and Excise (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures are in place to monitor and enforce fair employment and equal opportunities policies in Customs and Excise in Northern Ireland. [1912]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Customs and Excise, along with all other civil service departments and agencies with staff in Northern Ireland, submit an annual return via the Cabinet Office to the Fair Employment Commission. This covers the perceived religious composition of the workforce in Northern Ireland and those who apply for vacancies.

Customs also undertakes a full review of its policies and procedure relating to equality of opportunity in employment in Northern Ireland for the Fair Employment Commission every three years. The last such review was in 1996.

Individual personnel systems, such as appointments, personal appraisal, pay and grading and training and development opportunities are monitored in respect of community background for Northern Ireland, taking account of the Codes of Practice from the Fair Employment Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission.

As a matter of policy all Customs staff in Northern Ireland are receiving equal opportunities training.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been *(a)* the rate of and *(b)* the revenue raised through capital gains tax in each financial year since 1987–88. [2791]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* Figures on receipts are shown in Table 1.2 and rates of capital gains tax in Appendices A.5 and A.2 of the Inland Revenue Statistics 1996, a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information his Department has obtained concerning capital gains tax rates, thresholds and tapers in each of the other member countries of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [2795]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* The taxation of capital, including capital gains, varies widely between different member States.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been *(a)* the rate of and *(b)* the revenue raised through inheritance tax in each financial year since 1987–88. [2792]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* Figures on receipts are shown in Table 1.2 and rates of inheritance tax in Appendix A.6 of Inland Revenue Statistics 1996, a copy of which is in the Library.

Economic Policy

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the relationships between capital gains and inheritance tax rates, investment decisions and Exchequer revenues in advance of the Budget. [2794]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* This is a matter for the Chancellor in considering his Budget.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the number of documents passed to the Public Record Office in 1996 from all Government departments. [2504]

Mr. Hoon: The Question concerns a specific operational matter on which the Chief Executive of the Public Record Office is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the Chief Executive to reply direct.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Norman Baker, dated 10 June 1997:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about the above.

103,997 documents were passed to the Office in 1996.

A "document" is an archival unit, usually comprising a file, a volume or a bundle of papers rather than an individual sheet of paper.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department of the documents passed to the Public Record Office from all Government departments in 1965 what percentage he estimates have been *(a)* released under the 30-year rule in their entirety, *(b)* released under the 30-year rule in part only, *(c)* retained with a specific future date identified for release into the public domain, *(d)* retained with no specific future date identified for release into the public domain, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for; and what is the total of (a) to (g) as a percentage of all those documents passed to the Public Record Office in 1965. [2505]

Mr. Hoon: The Question concerns a specific operational matter on which the Chief Executive of the Public Record Office is best placed to provide an answer and I have accordingly asked the Chief Executive to reply direct.

Letter from Sarah Tyacke to Mr. Norman Baker, dated 10 June 1997:

I have been asked by the Lord Chancellor's Parliamentary Secretary to reply for the Public Record Office to your question about the above.

Regarding (a) and (b), records passed to this Office in 1965 were subject to a fifty year rule. The thirty year rule came into force in 1968, under the Public Records Act 1967.

Regarding (c) and (d), records passed to this Office could not as the same time have been 'retained' by government departments. Retentions were for specified periods, which were renewable.

Regarding (e), 44 Cause Books of the Chancery Division of the Supreme Court (J 12), dating from 1939, were destroyed in 1972, following the recommendations of the Committee on Legal Records in 1966 (Cmnd 3084). In addition, items from among the War Office, Registered Papers, General Series (WO 32), dating from 1855 to 1925, were destroyed in 1967 following a re-review of the contents of the class, as were a small number of items from the War Office reports and Miscellaneous Papers (WO 33), dating between 1925 and 1930, in 1968.

Regarding (f) and (g), no records passed to this Office in 1965 have been disposed of otherwise than by destruction, or are otherwise unaccounted for.

Details of the records transferred to the Public Record Office in 1965 appear as appendix II to the Report of the Keeper of Public Records for that year, laid before Parliament in 1966.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2508]

Mr. Hoon: No document falls due for transfer to the Public Record Office until it is 30 years old. The suitability of a document for selection for permanent preservation under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958 will be reviewed during that period. The Act does

not require statistics to be kept in the form requested. To do so would incur disproportionate cost. However, in order to comply with their duties under the Act, departments are obliged to make arrangements for the safekeeping of their records, with a view to their possible selection and transfer to the Public Record Office and eventual release to the public. The general arrangements for extended closure or retention of public records are set out in Chapter 9 of the White Paper Open Government of July 1993 (Cm 2290).

Civil Legal Aid

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans the Government have to extend the eligibility for civil legal aid to hearing before *(a)* industrial tribunals and *(b)* social security appeal tribunals; and if he will make a statement. [2843]

Mr. Hoon: There are no immediate plans to increase the scope of the legal aid scheme. There is to be a review of civil justice and legal aid and we will be able to consider the current scope of the scheme in the light of the outcome of that review.

Legal Services Ombudsman

Mr. Amess: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review in the public interest the effectiveness of the self-regulatory Office for the Supervision of Solicitors and the powers of the Legal Services Ombudsman. [2220]

Mr. Hoon: The effectiveness of the Office for the Supervision of Solicitors is, in the first instance, a matter for the Law Society. My Department intends later this year to carry out the first review of the office of the Legal Services Ombudsman since it was established at the beginning of 1991.

Abbas Gokal

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will call for a report from the Legal Aid Board into the case of Abbas Gokal. [1913]

Mr. Hoon: It is the courts not the Legal Aid Board that consider applications for legal aid in criminal cases. The Central Criminal Court granted legal aid in the case of Mr. Gokal. I obtained a report from the court about Mr. Gokal's application for legal aid in the light of the publicity following the jury's verdict in the case. I have since asked the Administrator at the court to review the court's procedures in relation to legal aid. I have also asked for all Crown Court centres to be alerted to the need for great care in the processing of applications for legal aid.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department, and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to his Department's budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2108]

Mr. Tom Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on 9 June 1997, *Official Report,* column *310.*

Concessionary Television Licences

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage (1) if he will change the rules of the television licence concessionary scheme for retired persons in sheltered complexes with wardens to enable the concession to continue once granted in circumstances where the warden's hours of work are reduced; [2883]

(2) if he will introduce a personal concession for retired persons in sheltered complexes of the kind granted in May 1988 to protect the television licence concessionary scheme for those in receipt of the concession at 1 January; [2884]

(3) what plans he has to extend the television licence concessionary scheme to retired residents in sheltered complexes with wardens working on site for 16 hours each week. [2882]

Mr. Fisher: Entitlement to the concessionary television licence fee is linked primarily to the accommodation occupied and the way in which it is provided or managed, rather than being a personal and portable benefit. The requirement for qualifying sheltered accommodation to have a carer who either lives within the scheme or works on site for at least 30 hours a week is designed to limit the scheme to sheltered housing directly comparable to a residential home. The Government has no current plans to amend the concessionary licence fee regulations.

Political and Special Advisers

Mr. Forth: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage if he will list *(a)* the name, *(b)* the salary, *(c)* the previous occupation and salary and *(d)* the terms and conditions of each political and special adviser in his Department; and what was the selection process used to appoint these persons. [2415]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* I have two Special Advisers, Mr. Julian Eccles and Mr. John Newbigin. Mr. Eccles was previously employed as an Associate Director with the Public Affairs Division of Hill and Knowlton. Mr. Newbigin, who works three and a half days a week for me, continues to work for Enigma Productions for one day and a half.

The terms and conditions of each appointment are set out in the draft model contract, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Special Advisers are paid within a range of £24,349 to £73,484. Their salaries are negotiated individually and are confidential within this range. Details of this and previous salary are not provided in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

These are personal appointments made by me following consultation with the Permanent Secretary of my Department and the Prime Minister.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Playing Fields

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement concerning the sale of school playing fields by local education authorities; and what plans he has to change present policy. [2145]

Mr. Alan Campbell: To aks the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to change Government policy regarding the sale of school playing fields. [3621]

Mr. Byers: We intend to make sure that those playing fields which schools and their local communities need are not sold in future.

My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and the Secretary of State for National Heritage are discussing this as a matter of urgency. We are looking at a wide range of options to ensure that all school pupils will have access to proper sports facilities.

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many acres of playing fields and at what locations have been sold over the last 10 years by the Durham local education authority. [2462]

Mr. Byers: Local education authorities are not required to report their disposals of playing fields to Central Government.

Provided that their schools continue to comply with the requirements for minimum playing field area in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1996, local education authorities may dispose of land belonging to them without reference to the Secretary of State. However, before considering any land as surplus, local authorities should consider carefully both future demand, from projected pupil numbers, and the needs of the wider communities that their schools serve.

As my hon. Friend is aware, the Sports Council has established a register of recreational land and the Government is considering how best to tackle the whole question of playing fields and sports provision for schools as a matter of urgency.

Secondary Schools

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pupils in each local education authority in England and Wales in each academic year from 1988–89 to 1996–97 who were educated in either grant-maintained or local education authority secondary schools came from outside the local authority area; and what percentage of the total school population that represents in each case. [2214]

Mr. Byers: The following table sets out the number of pupils aged 11–15 in each English local education authority who were educated in maintained schools and who came from outside the area of the local education authority in which they were educated. These numbers are expressed as a percentage of the total numbers of pupils aged 11–15 educated by the authorities. Data are available only for the academic years 1991–92 and 1993–94 and 1996–97.

LEA	*1991–92 imports 11 to 15*	*Imports as percentage of pupils Per cent.*	*1993–94 imports 11 to 15*	*Imports as percentage of pupils Per cent.*	*1996–97 imports 11 to 15*	*Imports as percentage of pupils Per cent.*
City	0	0	4	50	7	88
Camden	4,423	52	4,453	50	4,460	50
Greenwich	2,074	16	2,292	18	2,094	17
Hackney	1,258	17	1,075	14	991	13
Hammersmith	2,714	48	2,702	47	2,590	48
Islington	1,863	28	2,371	34	2,440	33
Kensington	1,893	68	1,562	56	1,980	68
Lambeth	1,375	21	1,226	17	1,276	18
Lewisham	2,305	24	2,016	20	1,957	19
Southwark	2,548	28	2,544	28	2,379	25
Tower Hamlets	1,080	10	785	7	784	6
Wandsworth	2,467	30	2,550	30	2,481	28
Westminster	3,321	53	3,670	57	3,606	54
Barking	741	9	969	11	933	10
Barnet	3,052	20	3,887	24	4,020	24
Bexley	1,016	8	1,474	11	1,349	10
Brent	551	6	1,162	11	1,188	10
Bromley	903	7	2,006	13	2,105	13
Croydon	1,501	11	1,470	10	1,835	12
Ealing	627	5	824	7	822	6
Enfield	1,186	8	2,133	14	2,192	14
Haringey	918	12	1,305	16	1,358	15
Harrow	770	8	1,384	13	1,295	12
Havering	1,003	7	1,127	8	1,201	9
Hillingdon	562	5	840	7	919	7
Hounslow	1,956	17	3,016	24	3,015	23
Kingston	1,002	16	1,498	22	1,558	23
Merton	1,026	14	1,338	18	1,382	18
Newham	687	5	511	4	539	4
Redbridge	854	7	1,340	10	1,356	10
Richmond	2,434	34	3,120	40	3,233	42
Sutton	1,549	17	1,921	20	1,791	17
Waltham Forest	318	3	485	4	493	4

LEA	1991–92 imports 11 to 15	Imports as percentage of pupils Per cent.	1993–94 imports 11 to 15	Imports as percentage of pupils Per cent.	1996–97 imports 11 to 15	Imports as percentage of pupils Per cent.
Birmingham	1,073	2	1,296	2	1,208	2
Coventry	342	2	400	2	383	2
Dudley	647	4	1,173	6	1,255	7
Sandwell	917	5	1,425	8	1,458	8
Solihull	1,313	11	2,258	17	2,498	18
Walsall	1,216	7	1,513	9	1,622	9
Wolverhampton	431	3	547	4	560	4
Knowsley	422	5	569	6	490	5
Liverpool	907	3	1,265	5	1,059	4
St. Helens	733	7	894	8	326	3
Sefton	811	5	1,174	7	1,097	6
Wirral	17	0	99	1	209	1
Bolton	690	4	813	5	844	5
Bury	604	6	862	8	816	7
Manchester	1,109	5	1,100	5	1,168	5
Oldham	1,235	8	2,082	13	2,139	13
Rochdale	318	3	298	2	301	2
Salford	408	4	430	4	347	3
Stockport	364	2	502	3	169	1
Tameside	516	4	842	6	984	7
Trafford	511	4	1,207	10	1,414	11
Wigan	1,577	8	1,487	8	1,071	5
Barnsley	172	1	221	2	224	2
Doncaster	212	1	218	1	218	1
Rotherham	677	4	1,278	7	1,230	7
Sheffield	186	1	152	1	136	1
Bradford	270	1	238	1	235	1
Calderdale	188	2	437	4	390	3
Kirklees	270	1	315	1	304	1
Leeds	920	2	1,017	3	1,186	3
Wakefield	416	2	528	3	566	3
Gateshead	241	2	407	4	371	3
Newcastle	817	6	848	6	803	6
North Tyneside	211	2	291	3	276	2
South Tyneside	377	4	330	3	304	3
Sunderland	295	2	436	2	503	3
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	0	0	0
Avon	681	1	716	1	696	1
Bedfordshire	708	2	679	2	690	2
Berkshire	1,579	4	1,463	3	1,344	3
Buckinghamshire	459	1	991	3	1,118	3
Cambridge	340	1	372	1	397	1
Cheshire	1,425	3	2,259	4	2,245	4
Cleveland	196	1	259	1	218	1
Cornwall	213	1	242	1	277	1
Cumbria	258	1	326	1	420	1
Derbyshire	780	1	600	1	587	1
Devon	299	1	504	1	522	1
Dorset	1,418	4	1,298	4	1,286	4
Durham	162	0	133	0	209	1
East Sussex	494	2	707	2	604	2
Essex	754	1	1,021	1	1,497	2
Gloucestershire	692	2	837	3	922	3
Hampshire	779	1	1,128	1	481	1
Hereford and Worcester	843	2	1,196	3	1,119	3
Hertfordshire	2,976	5	3,260	6	3,667	6
Humberside	1,227	2	1,183	2	1,070	2
Isle of Wight	6	0	1	0	0	0
Kent	743	1	1,212	1	1,289	1
Lancashire	699	1	835	1	899	1
Leicester	418	1	486	1	530	1
Lincolnshire	436	1	929	3	1,007	3
Norfolk	408	1	542	1	537	1
North Yorkshire	1,583	4	1,888	5	2,226	5
Northamptonshire	571	2	749	2	730	2
Northumberland	368	2	553	3	562	3
Nottinghamshire	450	1	730	1	728	1
Oxfordshire	1,472	5	1,680	6	1,708	6
Shropshire	360	2	582	2	389	2
Somerset	204	1	242	1	349	1
Staffordshire	684	1	1,266	2	1,339	2
Suffolk	667	2	728	2	727	2
Surrey	1,532	4	2,221	5	1,478	3

LEA	1991–92 imports 11 to 15	Imports as percentage of pupils Per cent.	1993–94 imports 11 to 15	Imports as percentage of pupils Per cent.	1996–97 imports 11 to 15	Imports as percentage of pupils Per cent.
Warwickshire	502	2	915	3	797	3
West Sussex	1,106	3	1,450	4	1,467	4
Wiltshire	253	1	472	1	408	1
England	100,135	4	124,667	5	124,332	5

1. The 1996–97 figures for Avon, Cleveland, Humberside and North Yorkshire represent the position prior to Local Government reorganisation.
2. The import figures are gross figures and not net of exports to other authorities. Hence the figures for England are not zero.
3. In some cases where no data were available, the 1996–97 figures have been estimated on the basis of previous returns.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list *(a)* capital projects in schools which have taken advantage of PFI and *(b)* planned and actual costs to public funds of each of these schemes over their lifetime; and if he will make a statement. [3020]

Mr. Byers: A number of schools PPP/PFI projects are being actively considered, and some are approaching contract signing stage. My right hon. Friend the Paymaster General is conducting a wide ranging review of PPP/PFI, and we plan to encourage the use of PPP/PFI to improve the condition of school buildings, in the light of the outcome of that review.

Dyslexia

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what provision is made by his Department to assist adults with dyslexia; [2446]

(2) what grants are available from his Department for adults with dyslexia; [2447]

(3) what steps he proposes to take to improve access to education and resources for adults with dyslexia; [2448]

(4) what plans he has to improve the funding available for adults with dyslexia. [2450]

Dr. Howells: The Department provides financial help to adults with dyslexia in a number of ways of which the following are among the most significant.

In higher education, dyslexic students, who are eligible for a mandatory award from their LEA, may qualify for one or more of the Disabled Student's Allowances available as part of their maintenance grant. The cost of these grants is met in full by my Department. The Department has also provided £28 million to further education colleges and universities for 1997–98 for Further and Higher Education Access Funds. These funds are available to students whose access to further and higher education might be inhibited by financial considerations or who, for whatever reason, including learning difficulties, face financial difficulties.

The Further and Higher Education Funding Councils make some funding available specifically in respect of provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including dyslexia.

There are no current plans for the Department to make additional provision in this area.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funds are available to local authorities to provide grants for adults with dyslexia. [2449]

Dr. Howells: The total education spending allowed for within the revenue support grant settlement for 1997–98 was £18,088 million. It is for individual local authorities to decide how to allocate the funding they receive between and within the services they provide, including whether to make grants available to adults with dyslexia.

Mature Students

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate he has made of the average maintenance *(a)* grant and *(b)* loan awarded to mature students in each year of study; and if he will make a statement; [2749]

(2) what estimate he has made of the average maintenance *(a)* grant and *(b)* loan awarded to mature students in Wales, in each year of study; and if he will make a statement. [2736]

Dr. Howells: The available information on student awards does not identify separately those awards received by mature students. Information on the average student loan is not available in the form requested, either in the Department or in the Student Loans Company. However, the average loan to students aged 26 years and over at the start of their course in the academic year 1995–96 according to place of study is given in the table.

Student loans: average loan (£)[1] to those aged 26 and over

Academic year	1995–96
England[2]	1,190
Wales[2]	1,110
United Kingdom	1,170

Source:
Student Loans Company.
[1] Average loan rounded to nearest £10.
[2] Country of study.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate he has made of *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of those studying for (i) undergraduate degrees and (ii) equivalent vocational qualifications are mature students; and if he will make a statement; [2746]

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on mature students. [2747]

Dr. Howells: There are no direct equivalences between undergraduate degrees and vocational qualifications. The table below provides an analysis by qualification aim of those studying at undergraduate level in HE institutions in England in 1996–97.

Undergraduate students in higher education establishments[1] in England 1996–97 (thousands)

Qualification aim	*Mature students[2]*	*All students*	*Percentage mature*
First degree	471.1	866.8	54.4
Professional qualifications	13.0	13.4	97.2
Diploma/Certificate in HE	41.3	48.9	84.5
HND/HNC	26.8	56.4	47.5
NVQ/SVQ levels 4 and 5	1.7	1.7	99.3
Institutional credit	53.8	56.3	95.6
Foundation course	3.0	3.9	77.5
Other undergraduate	60.7	63.9	95.1
Total	671.4	1,111.2	60.4

[1] Excludes HE in FE establishments.

[2] Students aged 21 or over in the current academic year.

My right hon. Friend welcomes the substantial increase that has taken place in the number of mature students in higher education, to the point where the number of mature entrants now exceeds the number of 18–21 year olds starting in higher education. Our policy is to widen the opportunities for all individuals to enable them to fulfil their intellectual and personal potential and to engage in learning throughout life and we shall be considering very carefully the relevant recommendations of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, which is expected to report next month.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate he has made of *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of mature students studying for (i) undergraduate degrees and (ii) equivalent vocational qualifications currently (1) are entitled to and (2) claim grants for (A) teaching fees and (B) maintenance, broken down into local authority areas; and if he will make a statement; [2748]

(2) what estimate he has made of *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of mature students studying for (i) undergraduate degrees and (ii) equivalent vocational qualifications in Wales currently (1) are entitled to and (2) claim grants for (A) teaching fees and (B) maintenance, broken down into local authority areas; and if he will make a statement. [2735]

Dr. Howells: The information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate he has made of the average amount owed by further education *(a)* students and *(b)* mature students in Wales to (i) the Student Loans Company and (ii) personal banks as a result of and at the end of their period of study, broken down into local authority areas; and if he will make a statement; [2737]

(2) what estimate he has made of the average amount owed by further education *(a)* students and *(b)* mature students to (i) the Student Loans Company and (ii) personal banks as a result of, and at the end of, their period of study, broken down into local authority areas; and if he will make a statement. [2750]

Dr. Howells: Information on student indebtedness to banks is not collected centrally. I have asked the Chief Executive of the Student Loans Company to write to the hon. Member about average debt to the Student Loans Company at 31 March 1997.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to publish a timetable for *(a)* the removal of the differences in funding between grant-maintained and local education authority schools, *(b)* the removal of grant-maintained status, *(c)* transferring responsibility for planning of all school places to the local education authorities and *(d)* introducing legislation to reverse the Greenwich judgment; and if he will make a statement. [3028]

Mr. Byers: Our plans for schools will be set out in a White Paper which we shall be publishing shortly. That will be followed by legislation in the Autumn.

SSA Methodology

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the time scale for the publication of the current review of SSA methodology for 1998–99; and if he will make a statement. [3034]

Mr. Byers: The review of the SSA methodology for 1998–99 is following broadly the same timetable as in previous years. Consultative meetings between central and local government representatives are taking place over the summer leading up to a report on options for possible SSA changes to be published in the autumn.

Standard Assessment Tasks

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to reduce the paperwork associated with the SATs; and if he will make a statement. [3030]

Ms Estelle Morris: We are determined to reduce the administrative load on teachers wherever possible. We have already combined the Department's separate annual consultations on assessment and reporting into a single consultation paper. And we are setting up a new Working Group to find ways of cutting bureaucratic burdens on teachers from whatever source.

Assisted Places

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the number of assisted places available in the *(a)* Birmingham, Yardley, *(b)* North Tyneside and *(c)* Sheffield, Brightside constituencies. [3079]

Mr. Byers: There are no schools participating in the assisted places scheme in any of the constituencies mentioned.

Class Sizes

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the average class size in each grant-maintained and LEA-controlled primary and secondary school, in the west Chelmsford constituency on 31 March, or the latest available date before that. [2252]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) on 10 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *365* which explains the Department's present position on the publication of data for individual schools.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many classes of five, six and seven-year-olds in each local education authority had more than 30 children on 1 January 1997 based on returns from the All Schools Census; and what this figure is as a percentage of the total number of classes of five, six and seven-year-olds in each case. [3192]

Mr. Byers: Information on classes of five, six and seven-year-olds was not collected centrally.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2511]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Schengen Agreement

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to how many pages the full Schengen Agreement runs; and how many of these pages are not released for public perusal. [2008]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Schengen Agreement of 1985 consists of 11 pages, which are in the public domain. The Schengen Convention of 1990 consists of 81 pages, also in the pubic domain. In addition, we understand that there are a number of technical and operational documents relating to implementation of these agreements, which are not in the public domain.

Laos

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to discuss the issue of unexploded bombs in Laos with *(a)* the Laotian Government, *(b)* the American Government, *(c)* the UN and *(d)* other relief agencies. [2972]

Mr. Fatchett: We are in touch regularly with the United Nations, who co-ordinate international assistance towards unexploded ordinance projects with the Lao Government. We have contributed more than £600,000 through various relief agencies in the last two years. There are no immediate plans for direct discussions with the Lao or United States Governments.

Leghold Traps

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the EC Commission on the use of leghold traps in the importation of wild caught fur; and if he will make a statement. [3044]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Commission reported to the 2 June General Affairs Council on the negotiations with Canada and Russia to conclude a Framework Agreement on Humane Trapping Standards. A decision on the Framework Agreement will be taken by the 19–20 June Environment Council.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government will introduce the legislation necessary for the United Kingdom's ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban treaty. [2722]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Legislation is being drafted and we hope to introduce it as soon as possible.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2517]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: In 1996 records for 1965 held by this Department were due for transfer to the Public Record Office in accordance with the Public Records Acts of 1958 and 1967. Ninety-seven per cent. of those records selected for permanent preservation amounting to some 636 feet were opened to public scrutiny. Figures on the number of documents involved are not kept owing to the disproportionate cost of keeping such statistics. 1.5 per cent. of these records were released with parts blocked out and a further 1.5 per cent. were withheld in their entirety. All withheld documents will be re-reviewed at intervals of not less than 10 years and will be released when their sensitivity is judged to have passed. The criteria for release are set out in the White Paper on Open Government of July 1993 (Cmd 2290).

This Department generally selects records for permanent preservation when they are 27 years old. In 1996 402 feet of records were selected for permanent preservation and 2,743 feet were destroyed. This destruction rate of 85 per cent. was unusually high owing to the volume of duplicated material between the files of the Colonial, Commonwealth Relations and Foreign Office in that year. No records were otherwise disposed of and all were accounted for.

Nuclear Weapons Register

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the establishment of a nuclear weapons register as proposed by the German Foreign Minister in December 1993. [2716]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We will examine the contribution to our goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons which might be made by proposals such as a nuclear arms register, particularly in the context of the Strategic Defence Review.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Jamaica, Trinidad and Belize

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what aid and other forms of assistance the Government plans to give to the Governments of (i) Jamaica, (ii) Trinidad and (iii) Belize in each of the next three years. [3045]

Clare Short: We will continue to provide bilateral assistance in the form of Technical Co-operation to Jamaica and Belize. Priority sectors are currently poverty alleviation, primary education, public sector modernisation and forestry projects.

We have no bilateral aid programme to Trinidad and Tobago.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage and how many documents in 1996 she estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2521]

Clare Short: No document falls due for transfer to the Public Record Office until it is 30 years old. The suitability of a document for selection for permanent preservation under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958 will be reviewed during that period. The Act does not require statistics to be kept in the form requested. To do so would incur disproportionate cost. However, in order to comply with their duties under the Act, departments are obliged to make arrangements for the safekeeping of their records, with a view to their possible selection and transfer to the Public Record Office and eventual release to the public. The general arrangements for extended closure or retention of public records are set out in Chapter 9 of the White Paper Open Government of July 1993 (CM.2290).

Laos

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance was given by Her Majesty's Government to the Laotian Government for clearance of unexploded bombs in each of the last three years. [2971]

Clare Short: We have not provided any bilateral support to the Laotian Government for the clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO). However, we have contributed over £543,000 in 1995–96 through United Nations and British NGO programmes for UXO clearance and community awareness activities in Xieng Khouang province and capacity building for the newly formed Lao National UXO Programme. In 1996–97 we gave a further £148,000 to Xieng Khouang project.

Mr. Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the casualty rates arising from unexploded bombs in Laos; and if he will make a statement. [2970]

Clare Short: No official data are currently available on casualty rates from unexploded ordnance in Laos.

PRIME MINISTER

Economic and Monetary Union

19. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will put the protocol on the third stage of economic and monetary union and the issue of the single currency on the agenda of the intergovernmental conference at Amsterdam. [1425]

The Prime Minister: Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) is not on the IGC agenda. The Government has no intention of reopening the protocol which protects our right to choose whether or not to join the third stage of EMU.

Trustees

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will arrange for *(a)* Lord Nolan's Committee on standards in Public Life and *(b)* the political and public honours scrutineers to be advised by the trustees of the funds that provided help in opposition to him and to other ministers, of the sources of those funds. [1706]

The Prime Minister: The Leader of the Opposition's Office Fund was set up in accordance with guidelines discussed and agreed with Sir Gordon Downey.

The fund was set up as a blind trust to prevent me being aware of the sources of the contributions to it. But the practice established in Opposition whereby the Chief Whip consults the trustees of the fund when he is preparing the information needed by the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee, will continue. If an individual recommended for such an honour has been a contributor to the Leader of the Opposition's Office Fund, that information will be made available to the PHSC.

G7 Economic Summit, Denver

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what matters with regards to the environment he plans to raise at the G7 meeting in Denver. [2874]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 June 1997]:* I shall be pressing for strong action on climate change, where the Government has already given a firm lead to the rest of the world through our commitment to reduce CO_2 emissions by 20 per cent. by 2010. I shall also be looking for practical measures to reduce pollution, help sustain our oceans, and supporting a new convention on the world's forests.

Political Appointees

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Prime Minister which political appointees since 1 May have been given executive authority over civil servants. [2852]

The Prime Minister: Two. Alastair Campbell as my Press Secretary, and Jonathan Powell as my Chief of Staff. On the terms of their appointments, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) on 2 June, *Official Report*, column *96*.

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister for what reasons the responsibilities of the previous Deputy Prime Minister in respect of the implementation and presentation of Government policy have been allocated to the Minister without Portfolio. [2836]

The Prime Minister *[holding reply Tuesday 10 June]*: I cannot answer for the last Government's arrangements. As regards the role of the Minister without Portfolio, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) on 3 June, Official Report, column *134*.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2507]

Dr. David Clark: No document falls due for transfer to the Public Record Office until it is 30 years old. The suitability of a document for selection for permanent preservation under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958 will be reviewed during that period. The Act does not require statistics to be kept in the form requested. To do so would incur disproportionate cost. However, in order to comply with their duties under the Act, departments are obliged to make arrangements for the safekeeping of their records, with a view to their possible selection and possible transfer to the Pubic Record Office and eventual release to the public. The general arrangements for extended closure or retention of public records are set out in Chapter 9 of the White Paper on Open Government of July 1993 (Cmnd. 2290).

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Aid

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what proposals she has to transfer to Wales and Scotland *(a)* powers to award or remove assisted area status and *(b)* powers to vary the system of selective regional aid; and if she will make a statement. [2935]

Mrs. Roche: The Government's proposals on the powers to be exercised by the new Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament in respect of regional assistance will be set out in White Papers to be published before the House rises for the Summer recess.

Radioactive Wastes

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is the public financial liability for the long-term management of radioactive wastes, including plutonium, arising from the current and historical operations of British Energy. [1782]

Mr. Battle: British Energy is responsible for meeting all the liabilities associated with its assets. There is no public liability for British Energy's current or historical operations. These liabilities will be financed by British Energy out of its own earnings and cashflow or through a segregated fund. The recently concluded contract for future AGR supplies potentially involves BNFL taking on liability for some of the waste arising from AGR reprocessing although the terms and value of the contract fully reflect this option.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assessment her Department has made of Professor Carlo Rubbia's proposals for a prototype 10 megawatt nuclear waste burning reactor. [2245]

Mr. Battle: The Department is aware of the proposals of Professor Carlo Rubbia for the development of a nuclear waste burning reactor, generally known as an energy amplifier. The Euratom Scientific and Technical Committee, which has members from all the member states of the EU, has reported to the European Commission on the proposals, and the report will be published shortly. The conclusions, with which my Department concurs, are that it is unrealistic, on the grounds of both cost and technical risk, to pursue the whole system at once, but that there are several aspects which may merit further work at this stage.

MOX Fuel

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to use MOX fuel in United Kingdom reactors. [1799]

Mr. Battle: A decision to use MOX fuel in United Kingdom reactors is a matter for the operators, concerned, British Energy, subject to meeting the necessary regulatory requirements.

Electricity Standing Charges

Mr. Stunell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will bring forward proposals to repeal section 18(3)(a) of the Electricity Act 1989; and if she will make a statement. [2931]

Mr. Battle: I have no current plans to repeal section 18(3)(a) of the Electricity Act 1989 which allows Public Electricity Suppliers to levy standing charges. I will, however, continue to examine ways to reduce fuel poverty.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Mullin: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what assistance her Department is proposing to provide to the Governments of (i) Jamaica, (ii) Trinidad Tobago and (iii) Belize over the next three years; and what assistance in each case is currently provided. [3042]

Mrs. Roche: My Department provides advice and assistance to British companies interested in trade and investment in Jamaica, Trinidad Tobago and Belize. We do not provide assistance to the governments of those countries, nor do we have any plans to do so.

British Steel

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations she has made to the United States Government to secure the withdrawal of the anti-dumping tariff imposed on British Steel on 30 November 1992. [2266]

Mrs. Roche: Exports to the United States of various British Steel products are subject to anti-dumping and countervailing duties. HM Government and the European Commission have made repeated representations to the US authorities on these cases. DTI has maintained close contact with British Steel on the cases, some of which are the subject of continuing legal action in the US courts. My right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade will be ready to make further representations if that is likely to help settle the matter.

Assisted Areas

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the President of the Board of Trade when she intends to review the allocation of assisted area status in Britain. [2476]

Mrs. Roche: The Government is considering whether a Review of the Assisted Area Map is necessary and will carry out a review as needed. I will announce the extent and nature of any review when we have looked at this issue.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will make a statement on the restrictions on foreign ownership of shares in *(a)* British Aerospace and *(b)* Rolls-Royce. [2184]

Mr. Battle: At the time of the privatisations of British Aerospace (1985) and Rolls-Royce (1987), the Government imposed a foreign shareholding limit on both companies. Since 1989, that limit has been set at 29.5 per cent.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will list the payments by the United Kingdom Government to *(a)* British Aerospace and *(b)* Rolls-Royce in each of the last five years, indicating in each case the reasons for the payments. [2185]

Mr. Battle: The payments made by my Department to British Aerospace and Rolls Royce in the last five years were as follows.

Launch aid

£ thousand

	BAe		*RR*	
	Payments	*Repayments*	*Payments*	*Repayments*
1992–93	28,600	40,900	0	22,700
1993–94	0	29,400	0	16,600
1994–95	0	19,200	0	19,500
1995–96	0	29,300	0	13,200
1996–97	0	42,710	0	23,600

Launch aid is a repayable but risk-sharing Government investment in specific projects for the design and development of civil aircraft, helicopters and aeroengines in the UK. If the project proves successful HMG will receive repayment of its contribution plus a real rate of return.

Civil aircraft research and demonstration (CARAD)

	BAe	*RR*
1992–93	1,749	*4,352
1993–94	1,539	*4,790
1994–95	1,361	5,402
1995–96	2,631	6,075
1996–97	2,224	4,609

CARAD ensures that essential aircraft technologies are available in the long term through an integrated national programme of research. It supports basic and applied pre-competitive research and technology demonstration. (Some of these payments are for extramural research managed by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and will include amounts paid by Rolls-Royce and British Aerospace to other research collaborators. An asterisk denotes estimated payments under the extramural programme managed by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency.)

Innovation and technology support

	BAe	*RR*
1992–93	733	470
1993–94	436	442
1994–95	308	647
1995–96	271	307
1996–97	93	163

These programmes encourage UK firms to undertake research and development in collaboration with others, including European partners and academia.

Other Departments, including MoD, may have made payments to these companies; this information is not held by my Department.

Life Forms Patents

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what is her policy on the patenting of life forms. [2844]

Mr. Battle: Apart from the exclusion of plant and animal varieties from patentability, current United Kingdom patent law permits the patenting of life forms.

Such inventions are considered against the same general criteria of novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability applied to all fields of technology.

Royal Greenwich Observatory

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to transfer the functions undertaken at the Royal Greenwich Observatory from their present location. [2570]

Mr. Battle: The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (PPARC) discussed the future of the Royal Greenwich Observatory and the Royal Observatory Edinburgh at its meeting on 21 May. I am now considering its advice with a view to an announcement as soon as possible.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to invite bids for the next round of the Single Regeneration Budget. [1814]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Regions, Regeneration and Planning to his question on 22 May 1997, *Official Report*, column *152*, which dealt with arrangements for Round 4 of the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund. We would like to see a more strategic approach to regeneration initiatives which encourages innovative local partnerships whilst directing resources to where they are needed most. Future arrangements for the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund will therefore be subject to the outcome of the comprehensive review of regeneration policies announced by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 3 June.

Challenge Funds

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received in respect of a review of the single regeneration budget challenge funds; and if he will make a statement. [2150]

Angela Eagle: Many organisations involved in the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund have asked about the Government's future intentions towards this scheme. There is a clear desire for a more strategic approach to regeneration initiatives and for a system which responds to need whilst keeping the innovation that was the result of the competitive process. In addition, therefore, to the interim arrangements which we have already announced for Round 4, my right hon Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 3 June a comprehensive review of the Government's regeneration policies, which will include a review of the SRB Challenge Fund.

HFC 134

Mr. Dafis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is taking to restrict the use of the gas HFC-134. [2083]

Angela Eagle: HFC–134a and other HFCs are greenhouse gases but do not damage the ozone layer. They have an important role to play in phasing out the use of ozone depleting substances controlled under the Montreal Protocol. The Government fully supports the concept of minimising emissions of HFCs and has voluntary agreements with the refrigeration, foam, fire, aerosols and vehicle air conditioning sectors to do so. Whilst the Government recognises that the responsible use of HFCs as replacements for ozone depleting substances can be justified, it is unlikely to be convinced that any new emissive applications of HFCs are necessary. Recent reports of plans to market self-chilling drinks cans, which would use and emit HFC–134a, are a very worrying development and the Government is urgently considering what action should be taken.

Water Companies

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he plans to take to ensure that, in seeking to avoid hosepipe bans, water companies take account of the implications for aquifer resources; and if he will make a statement. [2788]

Angela Eagle: Abstractions by water companies from aquifers and surface water sources have to comply with the maximum quantity and any other operational conditions specified in the licence for each abstraction. The Environment Agency has made plain that it will expect water companies to have in place a full range of demand management measures, including the imposition of hosepipe bans, before applying for variations in abstraction licence conditions under drought orders or permits.

The Government announced on 19 May 1997 its intention to review the water abstraction licensing system, and to introduce legislation requiring each water company to agree a detailed publicly available drought contingency plan with the Environment Agency.

Watercraft

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of personal watercraft on wildlife and the marine environment; [2663]

(2) what plans he has to take action against personal watercraft. [2664]

Angela Eagle: No assessment of the impact of personal watercraft on wildlife and the marine environment has been made by the Department.

Section 76 of the Public Health Act 1961 already provides for local authorities to make byelaws to regulate seaside pleasure boats for the prevention of danger, obstruction or annoyance to persons bathing in the sea or using the seashore. It is likely that personal watercraft can be regulated as pleasure boats under this Act, although a definitive interpretation is a matter for the courts.

My Department is leading an Inter-Departmental Working Party which is undertaking a review of byelaw powers for the coast. A discussion document issued in December 1996 identified coastal recreation management as a major issue. The many responses to this document are being analysed. The Working Party will meet again towards the end of the year to consider this analysis and agree an appropriate way forward.

Plutonium Waste

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Truro of 2 June, *Official Report*, column *48*, if he will list *(a)* the authors, *(b)* the date commissioned and *(c)* the expected completion date of the report on the disposal of high-level radioactive waste and spent fuel. [2751]

Angela Eagle: The study into research strategies for the disposal of high-level radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel follows from a commitment given in the previous Government's White Paper "Review of Radioactive Waste Management Policy. Final Conclusions" (Cm 2919). QuantiSci Limited was appointed to undertake the work in March of this year following competitive tendering. The scheduled completion date for its work is April 1999.

Endangered Species

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* arrests, *(b)* prosecutions and *(c)* convictions for breach of the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976 have taken place in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [2701]

Angela Eagle: The 1976 Act originally implemented the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in the UK. In 1984, however, it was largely superseded by EC legislation, which implemented CITES throughout the European Community. The 1984 legislation has recently been replaced by revised EC Regulations which came into force on 1 June 1997.

There is no central record of arrests, prosecutions or convictions for CITES offences. However, we are aware that since May 1996 at least 15 cases have been brought under CITES legislation, including one which resulted in a conviction. Of the remaining 14 cases, three have led to a formal caution and 11 are awaiting trial. No cases have been brought under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act itself.

Bathing Water Quality

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on viral monitoring of sea water in respect of bathing water quality; and what are *(a)* the testing frequency requirements, *(b)* the types of viruses tested for and *(c)* the arrangements for publication of results. [2849]

Angela Eagle: My Department's policy is governed by the EC Directive on the quality of bathing water. As stated in the Commission's Report on the quality of bathing water for the 1996 bathing season published last month, the United Kingdom is the only Member State to have organised an enterovirus monitoring programme. Concentrations of enteroviruses are checked at least twice in the season at bathing waters which failed the coliform bacteria standards in the previous season. The results for England and Wales are entered in the public register of the Environment Agency. The UK results are also published annually by my Department and are available in the Library.

Departmental Integration

Mrs. Ann Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress he has made in integrating the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport. [3218]

Mr. Prescott: Significant progress had already been made in integrating the policies of the two Departments. To secure the maximum advantage from integration, and to simplify lines of responsibility, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport and I have concluded that the two Departments should now be merged into a single Department to be known as the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

This change will take place from Monday 16 June. Detailed decisions on organisational structures will not be taken before the end of September, and will be preceded by a process of review and consultation with staff and Trade Unions.

Building Regulations

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to extend Part M of the Building Regulations to ensure that all new residential dwellings are accessible for disabled people. [2308]

Mr. Raynsford: In January 1995 the Department of the Environment issued a consultation paper on extending Part M of the Building Regulations, covering access and facilities for disabled people, to dwellings. The analysis of the responses to the consultation is complete, and active consideration is now being given to issues identified in the responses. These issues include technical points raised and also the cost of some of the measures proposed.

Social Housing (Disabled People)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that social housing built or renovated under the release of capital receipts meets the access requirements of disabled people. [2309]

Mr. Raynsford: Social housing, however funded, will have to comply with the relevant requirements of the Building Regulations. At present Part M of the Building Regulations, covering access and facilities for disabled people, does not apply to dwellings, but active consideration is being given to extending Part M in the light of the consultation exercise initiated in 1995.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he

estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2519]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department.

Regional Development

Mr. Gunnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he proposes to implement his plans for regional development agencies in England; and if he will make a statement. [3158]

Mr. Caborn: We plan to bring forward legislation in the Autumn to create regional development agencies in England to improve regional economic competitiveness and to provide for effective, co-ordinated regional economic development. It is intended that the boundaries of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) will be the same as the administrative areas of the Government Offices for the Regions, except that there will be a single RDA for the north-west region including Merseyside.

I am today beginning a series of regional tours to seek local views and to open a dialogue on how to take matters forward. The Government recognise that the English regions have different characteristics and different problems, and we do not wish to impose a single prescriptive model for the agencies. We want to ensure that the legislation allows each region to have arrangements which fit its particular circumstances, building on the work that many bodies are currently doing.

This morning I met representatives of the national organisations with a major interest in regional development, to outline my plans for touring the regions, to hear their views, and to encourage them to participate fully in the regional process.

As a means of focusing debate, I have produced a paper setting out the issues for discussion, and inviting any written views by 5 September. I have placed a copy of the paper in the Library.

TRANSPORT

Nuclear Fuel (Rail Transportation)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to conduct a safety review of the transport by rail of nuclear fuel flasks; and if he will make a statement. [2217]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The safety regulations of the transport of radioactive material by rail, including nuclear fuel, are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the safety record of this transport is maintained. There are no plans for a safety review at this time.

Heavy Goods Vehicles

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proposals he has to ensure that the heavy goods vehicle driving test includes a test using a laden vehicle. [2645]

Ms Glenda Jackson: We are looking very closely at training and testing learner lorry drivers on laden vehicles with a view to issuing a Consultation Paper. I will ensure that copies of such a Paper are put in the House Library and a personal copy is sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich.

Boeing 737

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what further action his Department proposes to take following Boeing's instructions regarding defective rudders on Boeing 737s. [2653]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Under the terms of the Chicago Convention, the United States of America is responsible, as the state of design, for the continued airworthiness of Boeing 737 aircraft.

The US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) published a notice of proposed rulemaking on modifications to the Boeing 737 in March. The FAA is currently reviewing comments on its proposals and is expected to publish its final rule shortly.

The CAA had no fundamental concerns with the proposals and will ensure that appropriate action is taken by operators of UK registered B737 aircraft to comply with the terms of whatever modifications are promulgated by the FAA.

Boeing 747

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the CAA have taken to ensure that the technical problems associated with the fuel tanks on Boeing 747s have been addressed by operators based in the United Kingdom. [2662]

Ms Glenda Jackson: Safety regulation of UK registered aircraft is the statutory responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

Under International Civil Aviation Organisation rules, primary responsibility for promulgating information necessary to maintain the continued airworthiness of an aircraft type rests with the State of Design. In the case of the Boeing 747 the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is the body responsible.

As a result of its investigation, the US National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has made some interim safety recommendations to the FAA, which are intended to reduce the risks of explosions in partially empty fuel tanks. The FAA is publicly consulting industry and other interested parties and if it determines that mandatory corrective action is necessary, it will issue an Airworthiness Directive.

In addition, Boeing has recommended some precautionary fuel tank inspections which are being carried out by United Kingdom operators of 747s. These inspections are primarily intended to seek information on the condition of equipment in and around fuel tanks; they are not checking for the existence of specific identified problems.

If the FAA issues any Airworthiness Directive related to this issue, it is likely that the CAA will make it mandatory for UK operators.

Air Bags

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what work he intends to undertake on the dangers posed by air bags to children in rear-facing child seats. [2647]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Department is very aware of this danger. The key factor is not research but ensuring that the public understand the hazard.

The wide media coverage of the hazard is especially welcome and I hope that it will continue. A poster by the motor industry, warnings contained in the Department's publication "Choosing Safety" and in the forthcoming editions of "Seat Belts and the Law" and "The Highway Code" should also help.

European legislation now requires manufacturers to fit a warning label to cars to alert motorists to the hazard. This is a minimum requirement, and I welcome any effort the car industry can make to improve the clarity of this warning.

We will continue to monitor the situation and press for whatever further action is appropriate.

Driving Examiners

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many approved driving examiners have been found to be operating in an unsatisfactory manner and have had their licence removed in the last five years. [2646]

Ms Glenda Jackson: In 1996–97 10 instructors were removed from the Register of Approved Driving Instructors because they were considered not to be "fit and proper" persons. A further 80 instructors were removed from the Register because they failed to meet the minimum acceptable standards of instructional ability when assessed by the Driving Standards Agency. The corresponding figures for 1995–96 were 12 and 75 respectively. Figures for the preceding years cannot be separately identified from those leaving the Register for reasons such as retirement.

London Underground (Wheelchair Users)

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions by what date the London Underground will be accessible to wheelchair users. [2998]

Ms Glenda Jackson: This is a matter for London Underground. However, as the Underground system was originally built with little regard to the needs of disabled people, and in view of the cost of rectifying this situation at over 270 stations, it is difficult to give a specific date for when the Underground will be fully accessible to all. London Underground's policy is to maintain and improve existing levels of access for disabled passengers where practicable and to incorporate improved accessibility into all new and rebuilt trains, new lines and extensions and station redevelopments. For example, the Jubilee Line Extension, when completed, will be fully accessible to wheelchair users.

Access to underground stations, as to other public transport stations and terminals, is covered by the provisions of Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act. There are specific provisions in the Part of the Act which deal with the removal of physical barriers to access where that is deemed reasonable. The Department for Education and Employment (which is responsible for that part of the Act) will be consulting on its proposals for its implementation.

Rail Regulation

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the relationship between the Government and the Rail Regulator. [2864]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The Rail Regulator is currently independent of Government, working to statutory duties in the Railways Act 1993. We have made clear that we intend to establish more effective and accountable regulation by the Regulator; we are now reviewing the options.

A1

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the reported accidents on the A1 north of Newcastle to the Scottish border over the last three years. [2959]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The number of reported injury accidents over the last three years is shown in the following table:

Number of reported injury road accidents on the A1 North of Newcastle to the Scottish border: 1994–96

Accidents

Severity	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Fatal	0	1	2
Serious	16	9	16
Slight	29	52	51
All	45	62	69

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how much of the length of the A1 from the Gosforth Interchange to the Scottish border is dual carriageway; and how much consists of single carriageway constructed within the last 18 years; [2960]

(2) if the state of the A1 north of Newcastle to the Scottish border will form part of his strategy review of the trunk road programme. [2961]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Lawrie Haynes to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 11 June 1997:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the A1 north of Newcastle.

There is 34km of dual carriageway and 60km of single carriage way between the Gosforth Interchange and the Scottish border.

During the last 18 years the following single carriageway schemes have been completed providing, generally, 7.3m wide carriageway with marginal strips:

Scheme	*Opened*	*Length of carriageway (£ million)*
Warenford Bypass	1978–79	2.0
Felton Bypass	1981	4.9
Belford Bypass	1983	5.0
Berwick Bypass	1983	9.0
Alnwick Bypass Stage 2	1985	6.5

You asked also if the A1 north of Newcastle to the Scottish border will form part of the Secretary of State's Strategic Review. Ministers have yet to announce the terms of reference for the strategic review, which I understand will cover the whole roads programme.

HEALTH

Corticosteroids

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the expenditure on GP-prescribed corticosteroids in each health district in England expressed as a value per head of resident population in the last year for which figures are available. [1341]

Mr. Milburn: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Dental Services

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the level of wastage of qualified dentists from the general dental service in each of the last five years; what estimate he has made of the total costs of such wastage to the NHS budget; and if he will make a statement. [1891]

Mr. Milburn: We do not collect information on wastage. Dentists are independent contractors and as such are free to choose the amount of work they carry out for the National Health Service. Their level of commitment to the NHS may vary for a number of reasons driven by personal choice and circumstances, including part-time working, early retirement and varying balance between private and NHS work.

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made, by value or volume of individual treatments, of the increased amounts of private dentistry undertaken by general dental practitioners. [1893]

Mr. Milburn: Private dental work is a matter for the dentist and the patient customer. There is no Government funding and no detailed information on private dental treatment is centrally collected.

Some gross earnings information on dentists is collected from the Inland Revenue survey, solely to inform the Doctors and Dentists Review Body recommendations on gross fees by giving information on dentists' expenses. This can be used to get a broad indication of the amount of other earnings by general dental service dentists. The latest data are for 1994–95, and indicate that there was an increase in the amount of earnings from sources outside the general dental service between 1992–93 and 1994–95.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how long a national health service dental patient may remain on a dentist's patient list without seeking treatment; and if he will make a statement. [1917]

Mr. Milburn: This area is under review. The registration periods were changed with effect from last September and now stand at 15 months for adults and children.

The continuing care arrangement between the dentist and patient is normally rolled on for a further 15 months each time the patient attends that dentist. It is not necessary to receive treatment in order to extend the registration but if a patient does not attend, his or her registration will lapse. There is no charge for registering or re-registering with a dentist prepared to accept a patient.

Medical Insurance (Tax Relief)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to *(a)* reduce and *(b)* remove the tax relief upon medical insurance premiums; and what consultations he has had with Treasury Ministers upon this subject. [2364]

Mr. Milburn: This is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Surrogacy

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the law on surrogacy; and if he will make a statement. [3622]

Ms Jowell: It is important that in an area as sensitive as surrogacy the law is kept under review in order to ensure that it continues to meet public concerns.

The legal position regarding surrogacy is clear:

surrogacy must not be commercialised; and

surrogacy arrangements are unenforceable.

However, since this issue was last examined, the number of difficult cases which have attracted public attention has increased, although because so many arrangements are entirely private it is always difficult to make any assessment of the numbers of cases.

In view of current concern, UK health ministers have invited a small team with the relevant expertise to take stock and reassess the adequacy of existing law in this difficult area.

The Terms of Reference for the review are as follows:

to consider whether payments, including expenses, to surrogate mothers should continue to be allowed, and if so on what basis;

to examine whether there is a case for the regulation of surrogacy arrangements through a recognised body or bodies; and if so to advise on the scope and operation of such arrangements;

in the light of the above to advise whether changes are needed to the Surrogacy Arrangements Act 1985 and/or section 30 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990.

Margaret Brazier, Professor of Law at Manchester University, will lead the review. The other team members will be: Susan Golombok, who is Professor of Psychology at the City University, London; and Alastair Campbell, Professor of Ethnics in Medicine, University of Bristol.

We have specifically asked the review team to consider the issue within the context that surrogacy should not be commercialised and that any woman who has a baby as part of a surrogacy arrangement should not be compelled to give it up if she changes her mind. We also want to know whether there is, realistically, any practical way in which surrogacy arrangements could or should be regulated and if so how.

Mid Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for the most recent date for which figures are available the number of people in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area awaiting non-emergency treatment *(a)* up to 12 months, *(b)* up to 18 months, *(c)* up to 24 months and *(d)* over 24 months. [2250]

Ms Jowell: The latest available information gives the position on 31 March 1997. On that date 6,164 patients were waiting for admission to Mid Essex Hospital Trust, on either an inpatient or day case basis, of whom 6,063 had been waiting less than 12 months and none of whom had been waiting more than 18 months.

Carers' Rights

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to issue guidance to general practitioners and primary health care teams about carers' rights under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995; [2310]

(2) what steps he intends to take to ensure that carers are informed of their rights under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995; [2311]

(3) what steps he intends to take to ensure that *(a)* carers receive written results of assessments carried out under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995 and *(b)* local authority staff are informed about carers' rights. [2312]

Mr. Boateng: The Department issued Policy Guidance and a Practice Guide on implementing the Act to social services departments, health authorities and National Health Service trusts in February 1996. The Guidance notes that general practitioners and other primary care staff are well placed to advise carers who are their patients of their assessment rights under the Act. The Guidance makes clear that social services departments should ensure that primary care staff have the relevant information to fulfil this role.

The Guidance also requires social services departments to ensure that their published information on community care tells carers about their rights under the Act. Information should be available to carers when they need it; it should be accessible to all members of the community and easy to understand.

It should also be part of routine assessment practice and, specifically, authorities are expected to inform carers who appear to be eligible under the Act of their right to request an assessment. Care plans and results of assessments should be confirmed in writing, or in a form which is accessible both to users and carers.

As part of our programme of research on community care, we are considering the impact of the Act. An inspection by the Social Services Inspectorate is also in preparation, which will look at how local authorities are implementing the Act.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2509]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department gave today.

Neuroleptic Drugs

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning the overuse of neuroleptic drugs in residential homes for the elderly; and if he will make a statement. [2988]

Mr. Milburn: Some representations regarding possible overuse of drugs, although not specifically neuroleptics, in residential homes for the elderly have been received from members of the public. It is for the clinician to decide what treatment should be prescribed to best meet individual patients' medical needs.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of MRSA have been recorded in each health authority district in each of the last 12 months. [2983]

Ms Jowell: Information on the total number of cases of infection or colonisation with methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is not collected centrally in England.

National epidemiological data on MRSA are compiled by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) rather than centrally by the Department of Health, from isolates submitted voluntarily by hospitals in England and Wales for specialist microbiological tests. From these data the number of incidents of MRSA—ie. three or more patients infected or colonised by the same strain of MRSA in a month from the same hospital—is recorded. The total number of affected cases is not recorded. A table showing

the number of incidents for the year ending April 1997 for each of the old regional health authorities in England has been placed in the Library.

Farmed Fish (Invermectin)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the human health risks posed by the use of ivermectin in the treatment of farmed fish; and if he will make a statement. [2103]

Mr. Rooker: I have been asked to reply.

We are not aware that any assessments of the human health risks posed by the use of ivermectin specifically in the treatment of farmed fish have been made.

Ivermectin is authorised in the EU for use in bovines, pigs, sheep and horses following thorough assessments of all required safety data by the Committee of Veterinary Medicinal Products (CVMP) in order to set a maximum residue limit (MRL). The purpose of MRLs is to ensure that no consumer, however extreme their diet, is at risk from the consumption of animal products containing residues at or above the level of the MRL.

However, an MRL has not been fixed for ivermectin in fish and there is no product authorised for such treatment. Nonetheless, ivermectin could be used to treat farmed fish under the prescribing cascade. Under this system, veterinarians may use their clinical judgment to prevent an animal from suffering by prescribing a veterinary medicine authorised in the UK for use in another species, a medicine authorised for human use or one made up "one-off".

The Veterinary Medicines Directorate tests for ivermectin in salmon under its non-statutory residues surveillance scheme. As no Maximum Residue Limit has been set for ivermectin in farmed fish, the Limit of Quantification, or LOQ (the point at which we can detect a measurable level of residues) is used as the Action Level for the purposes of reporting results in the quarterly Medicines Act Veterinary Information Service (MAVIS) and following-up with retailers and producers. The LOQ of the method used is 2 µg/kg. None of the 415 salmon samples collected under the 1996 non-statutory programme contained quantifiable residues of ivermectin.

DEFENCE

ASTOR Project

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the ASTOR project, with special reference to the employment implications and the timetable of the contract. [1922]

Mr. Spellar: Two contractors, Lockheed-Martin and Raytheon E-Systems, have completed competitive Project Definition studies. Invitations for Best and Final Offers for the Full Development and Production phase are being prepared, and we expect to issue them shortly. Both Lockheed-Martin and Raytheon have set up UK-based subsidiaries to carry out ASTOR work, and both are supported by UK sub-contractors. They have both offered UK industrial participation packages amounting to 100 per cent. of the contract value, over half of which work will be directly related to the ASTOR programme. Any export sales of the ASTOR system would further enhance employment prospects in the UK.

Consideration of the companies' detailed industrial participation proposals will form part of the assessment of the companies' Best and Final Offers.

Monkeys

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many monkeys died *(a)* during 1996 and *(b)* in 1997 to date in his Department's research establishments. [2396]

Mr. Spellar: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). I have asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Chisholm to Mr. Mike Hancock, dated 11 June 1997:

I have been asked to reply to your question about the number of monkeys which have died since 1996 in Ministry of Defence research establishments since as Chief Executive of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) this matter falls within my area of responsibility.

An essential but relatively small part of the work of DERA involves a number of experiments with animals, mainly rodents, in order to ensure that the protective measures provided to the Armed Forces are effective and safe.

I can assure you that all experimental work is carried out in accordance with the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. In compliance with this Act all animals used in scientific procedures are reported annually to the Home Office, the responsible authority for overseeing the implementation of provisions of the Act. The Home Office publish national annual statistics about the number of animal experiments in the UK in Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals in Great Britain.

A very small number of non-human primates are used in essential DERA research work and a total of 14 monkeys were reported in the 1996 annual return to the Home Office as used in experiments and were, or will be, humanely killed in accordance with the provisions of the 1986 Act. The 1997 return has not yet been made. In recent years our figures have usually represented significantly less than 1% of the number of non-human primates reported as being used in scientific procedures.

National Service

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from ex-national service men regarding recognition for their role between 1947 and 1963; and if he will make a statement. [2142]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence has received and replied to in excess of 50 representations from ex-National Servicemen, particularly through their constituency MPs, on a variety of subjects relating to their service to the Nation in the post-war years.

Their concerns have included the provision of a memorial to those who performed National Service, the institution of a new medal, pensions, and the formation of a Veterans' Affairs Unit.

On memorials, I have indicated that in the event that funding by private donation or public subscription for a memorial were to be found, my Department would be happy to assist in identifying a suitable site and to provide representation at any dedication ceremony.

Auxiliary Oiler Contract

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what *(a)* detailed and *(b)* major changes his Department has sought to make to the design of ships under the Auxiliary Oiler contract; what was the cost to the Ministry of Defence of such changes; and what measures have been taken to ensure that costs do not escalate on the contract; [2850]

(2) whether the Auxiliary Oiler contract is running to the agreed tender price; and if he will make a statement; [2857]

(3) if the Auxiliary Oiler contract is on schedule; and if he will make a statement. [2856]

Mr. Spellar: The MOD has not sought any detailed or major design changes to the vessels to be procured under the Auxiliary Oiler (AO) contract. The Prime Contractor, VSEL, is designing the vessel to the agreed contract specification and price. The AO contract is currently on schedule and to cost.

Flight Data Recorders

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reconsider his Department's policy on the fitting of flight data recorders to military aircraft. [2550]

Mr. Spellar: It is our policy to fit all new aircraft with flight data recorders. Retrofits are considered on a case-by-case basis taking account of service life remaining, aircraft safety record, cost and operational limitations. We have no plans to change this policy.

Data recorders have already been fitted to the following in-service aircraft fleets: Harrier GR7/T10, Hawk, Lynx, Nimrod, Sentry, Tornado F3, Tornado GR1, Tristar, Tucano and VC10 C1. Retrofit programmes are planned for the BAe 125, BAe 146, Chinook, Lynx, Puma, Sea King and VC10 K fleets; installation into the Jaguar and Sea Harrier/Harrier T4 fleets is under consideration.

Military Personnel (Attached Duties)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel are currently on attached duties with foreign military forces; and which countries are involved. [2394]

Dr. John Reid: As a country with significant overseas interests and global responsibilities, the UK provides support and assistance, to a wide variety of Organisations and foreign Armed forces. The numbers vary from time to time. However according to available records, on 1 June this year there were 749 UK Service personnel on attached duties with the following countries:

Australia
Antigua
Bangladesh
Barbados
Belize
Bermuda
Belgium
British Virgin Islands
Brazil
Brunei
Baltic States
Canada
Czech Republic
Denmark
Egypt
France
Germany
Ghana
Indonesia
Italy
Kenya
Kuwait
Malaysia
Monserrat
Namibia
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Pakistan
Oman
Saudi Arabia
Singapore
Sri Lanka
South Africa
Spain
Turks and Caicos Islands
United Arab Emirates
Ukraine
United States
Zimbabwe

In addition there were 1,883 UK Service personnel attached to NATO Headquarters and Agencies in the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Norway, Netherlands, Denmark, Portugal and Turkey. There were also 7 Service personnel attached to the United Nations Headquarters in New York, 6 attached to the WEU Headquarters in Belgium, and 4 attached to the Five Power Defence Arrangements Integrated Air Defence System Headquarters in Malaysia.

The above figures do no include UK Service personnel who are deployed overseas but are not attached to foreign military forces, for example Service personnel working in our Embassies, UK forces deployed on UN operations, or our forces deployed on coalition operations in the Gulf or in Former Yugoslavia.

Parachute Training Systems

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which private companies have formal arrangements or are permit holders with the MOD for the exploitation of the British Army Training and Parachute Training Systems. [2780]

Mr. Spellar: MOD's only extant licence for parachute training equipment relates to a parachute training mat and is held by Recticel Sutcliffe Ltd. MOD has several licences for other training equipment, but those are not related to parachute training and are mainly in the field of computer software.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what facilities are available to Sector Ltd.; and whether it is the only company to have a formal

agreement with the UK Defence Secretary which permits the exploitation of British Army Training and Parachute Training Systems. [2782]

Mr. Spellar: Sector Ltd. does not hold a current licence for the exploitation of British Army parachute training items. The company terminated its previous licence by joint agreement on 8 May 1997 after many years in which no sales under the licence were reported to MOD. Accordingly, no special facilities are currently available to Sector Ltd. They will be accorded the same treatment as any other company approaching MOD for access to its facilities. No other company has been licensed by MOD to exploit the parachute training items formerly licensed to Sector Ltd.

Tactica Armoured Vehicles

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tactica armoured vehicles have been purchased by his Department; which type of weapons are fitted to the vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [2784]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has purchased 35 Tactica armoured vehicles. The vehicles have no offensive capability and are not fitted with weapons.

Water Cannon

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is standard military operating procedure to use marker dye when deploying water cannon against peaceful demonstrators. [2783]

Dr. John Reid: Water cannon is not currently used by the Army in any circumstances, with or without marker dye.

Prisoners of War (Pay)

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to make available the review of deductions from the pay of officer prisoners of war and protected personnel. [3027]

Mr. Spellar: The detailed report of the Review has been submitted and is now being studied with care. The result will be announced as soon as possible.

Departmental Property

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the homes his Department owns are currently empty; how many have been empty for more than six months; and if he will provide a breakdown in each case by location. [3037]

Mr. Spellar: As at 31 March 1997, the most recent date for which figures are available, the Ministry of Defence held a stock of 65,800 Service families quarters in Great Britain of which 13,142 were empty. In addition, the Department has 3,059 families quarters in Northern Ireland of which 222 were empty.

Of the empty properties in Great Britain: 1,755 had been identified for disposal; 3,364 had been allocated to incoming families; 2,533 were awaiting major upgrade works; 633 had been identified as temporarily surplus and were being offered to local authorities or housing associations for short to medium term leasing and, finally, 1,117 were not available for disposal or leasing out as they were on military bases and security considerations prevent such action. Taking these management and security consideration into account results in a net voids level of 3,740—that is 5.86 per cent. of stock.

It is not possible to identify how many of these have been empty for over six months as such information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The best available breakdown by location, that is by Defence Housing Executive (DHE) Area, is as follows:

Area 1: 322; Area 2: 189; Area 3: 270; Area 4: 91; Area 5: 102; Area 6: 54; Area 7: 348; Area 8: 149; Area 9: 190; Area 10: 270; Area 11: 139; Area 12: 85; Area 13: 121; Area 14: 170; Area 15: 31; Area 16: 47; Area 17: 36; Area 18: 125; Area 20: 120; Area 21: 260; Area 22: 166; Area 23: 189; Area 24: 112; Area 25: 154.

A map showing the coverage of DHE Area across Great Britain is available in the Library of the House. It should be noted that there is no Area 19.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what initiatives his Department will undertake to further the prospects of achieving the global elimination of nuclear weapons. [2715]

Dr. John Reid: We have already made clear our commitment to the goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons and to press for multilateral negotiations towards mutual, balanced and verifiable reductions in nuclear weapons. We will be examining how best to implement that commitment, particular in the context of the Strategic Defence Review.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what is his Department's assessment of the total number of deployed nuclear warheads that represents a minimum deterrent for the United Kingdom; [2719]

(2) when he intends to implement Her Majesty's Government's policy not to deploy more warheads on Trident than were deployed on Polaris. [2721]

Mr. Reid: The Government has already made plain its commitment to the retention of Trident. Our deterrence requirements, including warhead numbers, will however be examined as part of the Strategic Defence Review.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Trident D5 missiles his Department intends to purchase from the United States. [2720]

Mr. Spellar: The present planning assumption is that the UK will purchase 65 Trident missiles. This requirement will be tested during the Strategic Defence Review before final decisions are made.

Mr. Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's latest estimate of the unit cost of purchasing Trident D5 missiles from the United States in the present financial year. [2718]

Mr. Spellar: If it is decided to proceed in accordance with present planning assumptions, my department will be placing further orders for Trident D5 missiles during the current UK financial year. The unit cost of the missiles will be a matter for negotiation between the manufacturers

and the US Department of Defence, which order on their own behalf and on ours in identical terms. The US DOD estimate a cost of $21 million per missile in respect of recent orders. The figure excludes guidance equipment, re-entry bodies and spares.

WE-177s

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department expects to remove all remaining WE-177s from operational service. [2717]

Dr. John Reid: It was announced in April 1995 that all WE-177 bombs would be withdrawn from operational service by the end of 1998. In line with the Government's commitment to be as open as possible, I am now able to confirm that all these bombs will be withdrawn by 31 March of that year.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2518]

Mr. Spellar: No document falls due for selection and transfer to the Public Record Office until it is at least 30 years old. The suitability of a document for permanent preservation under the terms of the Public Records Act, 1958, will be reviewed during that period. The Act does not require statistics to be kept in the form requested. To do so would incur disproportionate cost. However, in order to comply with their duties under the Act, Departments are obliged to make arrangements for the safekeeping of their records, with a view to their possible selection and transfer to the Public Record Office and eventual release to the public. The general arrangements for extended closure or retention of public records are set out in Chapter 9 of the White Paper on Open Government (Cm 2290) published in July 1993.

WALES

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many pupils currently receive support from the assisted places scheme in each of the recipient schools; if he will state the total amount of cash received by each school since the assisted places scheme began; and if he will make a statement. [1996]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is shown in the following table:

School	*Number of APS pupils in scheme 1996–97*	*Cash received from financial year 1981–82 to date*
Christ College	101	3,546,477
Ffynone House[1]	7	22,032
Howell's, Cardiff	186	4,847,708
Howell's, Denbigh	83	[2]3,664,341
Kings Monkton[1]	11	39,177
Llandovery College	69	2,288,966
Lowther College[3]	—	38,953
Monmouth Boys	146	4,810,473
Monmouth Girls	82	2,078,708
Rougemont School[1]	15	50,660
Ruthin School[1]	11	49,622
Penrhos College[4]	—	2,452,683
Rydal School[4]	—	2,241,682
Rydal Penrhos	142	750,478
St. Clare's School[1]	14	38,770
St. Gerard's School[1]	9	24,655
St. John's College[1]	11	28,557
Total all Wales	887	26,973,943

[1] Joined the scheme September 1996.
[2] Excludes final payment for academic year 1995–96 which has yet to be claimed.
[3] Lowther College closed in July 1982.
[4] Amalgamated to become Rydal Penrhos with effect from 1996–97.

Low Pay Commission

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representatives there will be on the Low Pay Commission from Wales; and if he will make a statement on prospects for a minimum wage in Wales. [2000]

Mr. Hain: The Low Pay Commission will comprise representatives of employers, including small businesses, employees and independents. Before making its recommendations to Government on the level at which the National Minimum Wage might be set, it will take into account the economic circumstances prevailing at the time throughout the UK. I have specifically requested that it takes evidence from businesses and others in Wales.

Nursery Education

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the percentage of four-year-olds in nursery education in each LEA area in Wales. [1998]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is shown in the following table. Pupils may attend other schools outside the LEA area in which they reside, and there are inconsistencies between the dates on which pupil and population numbers are assessed. These affect all LEAs and have resulted in percentages exceeding 100 in two cases.

LEA area	*Percentage of 4 year olds in schools*[1]
Blaenau Gwent	95.3
Bridgend	87.5
Caerphilly	87.1
Cardiff	82.2
Carmarthenshire	99.0
Ceredigion	87.7
Conwy	88.3
Denbighshire	94.2
Flintshire	96.2
Gwynedd	72.9
Isle of Anglesey	78.6
Merthyr Tydfil	99.0
Monmouthshire	79.2
Neath Port Talbot	96.0
Newport	93.5
Pembrokeshire	95.2
Powys	103.9

LEA area	Percentage of 4 year olds in schools[1]
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	90.7
Swansea	99.5
The Vale of Glamorgan	92.0
Torfaen	97.5
Wrexham	102.5
Wales	91.5

[1] The number of pupils aged four at 31 December 1995 on roll at maintained nursery, primary and special schools and at independent schools at Janaury 1996 as a percentage of the estimated resident population of four-year-olds at mid-1995.
Source:
January 1996 Schools' Census and Registrar General's population estimates.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he plans to increase the number of three and four-year-olds in nursery education. [1999]

Mr. Hain: Our initial aim is to ensure a free, at least part-time, place for every four-year-old whose parents want one; with targets for extending provision to three-year-olds. We shall be consulting shortly with the local authority, voluntary and private sectors and other interested bodies in Wales about arrangements for early years education from April 1998.

Women Employees

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the number of women in *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time jobs (i) in 1987 and (ii) at the latest available date. [2001]

Mr. Hain: The following table shows the number of women in part-time and full-time jobs, including the self employed.

Women in part-time and full-time jobs in Wales

Not seasonally adjusted

	Spring '1987	Autumn 1996
Part-time	192,000	257,000
Full-time	244,000	281,000

Source:
Labour Force Survey.
[1] Prior to 1992 data are available for Spring (March to May) only.

Investment

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will list the incentives available for enterprises located in areas of high unemployment which plan further investment to *(a)* create new jobs and *(b)* safeguard existing jobs, with particular reference to south Wales; [2257]

(2) if he will list the incentives available for inward investors in areas of high unemployment with particular reference to south Wales. [2258]

Mr. Hain: The main form of Welsh Office incentive available in the south Wales Assisted Areas is Regional Selective Assistance (RSA). Grant is available to indigenous companies and inward investors alike, to help with eligible investment projects which create and/or safeguard jobs. Other Welsh Office assistance includes four types of innovation grant offered under the SMART WALES banner, which are available to small and medium sized enterprises. Various other incentives are offered by the Welsh Development Agency, Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, the Training and Enterprise Councils and local authorities. Comprehensive details of the forms of assistance available in specific areas is available from Business Connect Wales (telephone: 0345 96 97 98 or Internet http://www.bc-wales.org.uk).

Later this summer we will publish a Welsh Economic Strategy, which will set out our general approach and priorities. My right hon. Friend is currently consulting the business community in Wales about how their voice may best be heard within Government.

Telecommunications

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the provision of telecommunication services in the Llanthoney Valley near Abergavenny. [2371]

Mr. Hain: None.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2514]

Mr. Ron Davies: No document falls due for transfer to the Public Record Office until it is 30 years old. The suitability of a document for selection for permanent preservation under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958 will be reviewed during that period. The Act does not require statistics to be kept in the form requested. To do so would incur disproportionate cost. However, in order to comply with their duties under the Act, departments are obliged to make arrangements for the safe keeping of their records, with a view to their possible selection and transfer to the Public Record Office and eventual release to the public. The general arrangements for extended closure or retention of public records are set out in Chapter 9 of the White Paper Open Government of July 1993 (Cm 2290).

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the species and habitats included as performance indicators for Welsh ESAs and the specific objectives relating to each; and if he will make a statement concerning progress made by farmers in respect of these species and habitats. [2684]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The information requested is in the Welsh Office report: Targets and Performance indicators for ESAs in Wales October 1995. Copies of the report have been placed in the Library of the House. Reports on progress are not yet available.

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his policy towards environmentally sensitive area schemes in Wales; and what is *(a)* the budget currently available for ESAs, *(b)* the number of farmers and landowners entered into

each ESA scheme, *(c)* the area of land so entered and *(d)* the number of project officers employed to promote schemes. [2688]

Mr. Griffiths: The Government is committed to an effective agri-environmental schemes for Wales. The ESA programmes are included in a review of agri-environmental schemes, the results of which will be announced later this year. The provision for 1997–98 is £5.89 million. The current number of agreement holders and area under agreement for each ESA is shown in the following table. Countryside and Agricultural Information Service (CAIS) and ESA Project Officers all promote the scheme. I estimate that 2.4 staff years are spent on this activity.

ESA	*Number of agreement holders*	*Number of hectares under agreement*
Cambrian Mountains	372	45,690
Lleyn Peninsula	391	18,741
Ynys Mon	342	17,345
Radnor	399	32,329
Preseli	234	12,676
Clwydian Range	64	3,033
Total	1,757	129,814

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many cases of MRSA have been recorded in each health authority district in Wales in each of the last 12 months. [2987]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The available data on the number of reported cases are given in the following table:

Laboratory confirmed cases of MRSA in Wales[1]

	Health Authority area				
	Bro Taf	*Dyfed Powys*	*Gwent*	*Morgannwg*	*North Wales*
May 1996	38	19	48	51	34
June 1996	71	14	42	49	29
July 1996	157	27	25	27	32
August 1996	126	10	37	49	28
September 1996	95	15	36	50	26
October 1996	122	20	32	70	55
November 1996	61	8	16	49	45
December 1996	66	21	68	77	55
January 1997	159	29	77	106	86
February 1997	82	42	64	96	91
March 1997	79	34	62	94	63
April 1997	28	27	39	107	85

Source:
CDSC Welsh Unit MRSA Surveillance Programme in Wales.

[1] As the reporting of cases by laboratories is a continuous process the level of completeness of the figures shown may vary. Data may include some GP referrals. The number indicated are patients identified with MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus). Only a proportion of these will have clinical illness (estimated at 50 per cent.) due to MRSA infection. The remainder will be carriers of the organism. Cases where the area of residence of the patient was not provided have been included with data for the Health Authority in which the reporting laboratory is located.

Abergavenny Slaughterhouse

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received about the proposed closure of the Abergavenny slaughterhouse; and if he will make a statement. [2377]

Mr. Win Griffiths: We have received several representations about the future of the Abergavenny slaughterhouse and whether it will participate in the Over Thirty Months Scheme, which allows for the purchase, slaughter and ultimate destruction of cattle over 30 months of age. The Intervention Board Executive Agency will announce the successful bidders soon.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability Benefits

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what assessment she has made of the impact of the Benefits Integrity Programme on the *(a)* staffing and *(b)* delivery of the ordinary claiming process for disability benefits; [2442]

(2) what procedures Benefit Agency staff will be expected to follow in relation to claimants who are revealed as claiming a lower level of disability living allowance than they are eligible for under the Benefit Integrity Programme; [2443]

(3) what training and over what average length of time will be provided to Benefits Agency staff who will be visiting claimants of disability living allowance from July onwards under the Benefits Integrity Programme. [2444]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is rebuilding integrity in, and public support for, the Social Security system and the way in which public money is spent. Research by the Department indicates that we may be paying £0.5 billion a year to people who are not entitled to receive it. We need to focus on those who are properly entitled to benefit.

This is why we have set up the Benefit Integrity Project. However, we do regard it as essential that disabled people are treated fairly and with respect, and in an unthreatening way. The administration of this programme is a matter for Peter Mathison, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member with further details.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. Paul Burstow, dated 10 June 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the Benefit Integrity Programme.

The Benefit Integrity Project was set up in response to the recent Benefit Review of DLA. Over the next two years, specially trained staff will make enquiries by postal questionnaire or home visit in around 425,000 cases to establish whether Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is being paid correctly.

The Benefit Integrity Project is a completely separate operation from the processing of new claims to DLA and as such, will have no effect on the staffing and delivery of the normal claims process.

The Benefit Integrity Project is intended to confirm that the correct rate of benefit is in payment. Where it appears that the incorrect rate is in payment, the case will be passed to an independent Adjudication Officer to consider a review of the existing decision. Any new decision will be based on all the available evidence and where appropriate will lead to an increase in the rate of benefit. All new decisions will carry the normal rights to seek a further review or appeal.

Visiting Officers for the Benefits Integrity Project will be drawn from existing experienced staff located at Disability Benefit Centres. If there is a need to transfer experienced staff currently processing claims to the Project, they will not be released until their

replacements are fully trained. Building upon their existing knowledge, each Visiting Officer will attend a five day course which will cover the background to the Project, visiting and interviewing skills, security awareness and staff safety.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Correspondence

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the letter of 12 May, ref. YM631037C, why the hon. Member for Walsall, North has not received a full reply from the Disability Benefits Directorate over the case of a constituent; and why the direct line 01253 337792 was unobtainable on 5 June. [2840]

Mr. Denham: One of our key aims is to improve the service provided to claimants and other customers. Queries on Benefits Agency operational matters are the responsibility of Peter Mathison, its Chief Executive. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Peter Mathison to Mr. David Winnick, dated 10 June 1997:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning a reply from the Disability Benefits Directorate over the case of a constituent and why the direct line 01253-337792 was unobtainable on 5 June.

It may help if I explain that at as you copied me your letter of 8 May to the Director of Disability Benefits, I arranged for the issues raised to be investigated. The acknowledgement letter of 12 May from the Disability Benefit Director should have advised you that I would be responding by 9 June and not by 27 May. Unfortunately this was a mistake for which I apologise. My reply was issued on 9 June. The Benefits Agency Business Plan states that the Agency will reply to MPs within an absolute target of 20 Working days from the date of receipt of the correspondence.

Due to a reorganisation of the Disability Benefits Unit Official Correspondence Section, one of the direct line numbers, 01253 337792, was disconnected earlier this year. Immediate action was taken to amend existing stocks of stationery. Unfortunately this did not happen in the acknowledgement sent to you and I offer you my sincere apologies. I can assure you that procedures are in place to prevent a reoccurrence.

I have arranged for the list of current direct line numbers to be sent to you.

I hope you find this reply helpful.

Child Maintenance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make it an offence to *(a)* conceal assets from the Child Support Agency and *(b)* try to reduce income in order to avoid paying maintenance. [1118]

Mr. Bradley: The Child Support Agency already has wide powers to obtain and verify information required to assess child support maintenance. Also, where clients believe that income or assets have been misrepresented they can seek a departure from the formula assessment. However, we will be looking closely at this and other areas of the Agency's operations over the coming months to consider whether improvements can be made.

Benefits Agency

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will list *(a)* the terms of the moratorium which will apply to the Benefits Agency (Wales) Blueprint for the Future and *(b)* the mechanism for undertaking a review of this and other Benefits Agency change proposals. [1727]

Mr. Field: The "Benefits Agency Wales - Blueprint for the Future" consultation document was published on 15 November 1996 and the period of public consultation was extended to 28 February 1997, to ensure that Benefits Agency customers and their representatives were able to make the representations that they wished on the consultation document.

These representations will be considered by Ministers in due course, and announcements will be made in the light of these considerations.

We will be assessing our proposals in the light of this document, and also each of the proposed Benefits Agency initiatives which are part of the Department's current programme of changes to ensure that they will provide the improved services, better security and value for money that we want to see in a modernised Social Security system. Announcements will be made in due course.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage and how many documents in 1996 she estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by her Department in full, *(d)* retained by her Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2522]

Mr. Field: In 1996 the Department of Social Security did not transfer any documents to the Public Record Office. However, during that year 17,935 files were reviewed of which 1,392 were selected for permanent preservation and transferred to the Public Records Office in March 1997. None of the files was censored. No applications were made to the Lord Chancellor to retain documents in full or in part. A total of 15,957 files were destroyed, no files were otherwise disposed of or unaccounted for.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Education Standards

5. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to improve education standards in Northern Ireland. [1382]

27. **Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to improve education standards in Northern Ireland. [1404]

28. **Miss Melanie Johnson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to improve education standards in Northern Ireland. [1405]

Mr. Worthington: The Government is committed to raising standards across all sectors. In working up plans for Northern Ireland, I will be giving particular attention to the provision for pupils at pre-school and early primary school; and to laying secure foundations in literacy and numeracy. We will be developing provision for vocational education and strengthening the linkage between

secondary schools, Further Education and Training. Improving school discipline and teaching quality, and in particular promoting strong leadership from headteachers, will also be given priority.

Peace Campus Project (University of Ulster)

7. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the peace campus project proposed by the University of Ulster. [1384]

Mr. Worthington: The Government is very much aware of the efforts to find appropriate means of achieving economic and educational regeneration in the Springvale area, and of the innovative proposals under consideration which seek to deliver these objectives. My officials are currently in discussion with both the University of Ulster and the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education about ways of delivering the desired outcomes.

Peace Process

9. **Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the Northern Ireland peace process. [1386]

10. **Mr. Gunnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the Northern Ireland peace process. [1387]

11. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on discussions she has had with the Northern Ireland political parties in respect of the peace process. [1388]

13. **Ms Beverley Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the Northern Ireland peace process. [1390]

15. **Dr. Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on current progress in the peace process. [1392]

18. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on progress in the Northern Ireland peace process. [1395]

19. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on current talks taking place in order to reach a political settlement. [1396]

22. **Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the Northern Ireland peace process. [1399]

25. **Mr. McNulty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on the Northern Ireland peace process. [1402]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber).

17. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the intention of Sinn Fein and the IRA to seek a peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland. [1394]

Marjorie Mowlam: Two meetings have been held between Sinn Fein and officials to assist us to assess whether Sinn Fein is genuinely ready to give up violence and commit itself to politics alone. It has not been possible to make a firm assessment yet.

Youth Unemployment

12. **Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to reduce unemployment among young people in Northern Ireland. [1389]

Mr. Worthington: The Government will pursue policies to promote economic growth and job creation, and we will offer young people constructive alternatives to benefit. In particular, the New Deal is our pledge to 18–24 year olds who have been unemployed for over six months, to enable them to develop and realise their potential. They will be offered training and employment opportunities with employers, the voluntary sector and an environmental task force. I believe that both young people and industry will be keen to make the most of these new opportunities.

Constitutional Proposals

14. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement on her constitutional proposals. [1391]

Marjorie Mowlam: I would like to see new and widely acceptable political institutions established in Northern Ireland as part of a wider political settlement. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said that the Framework Documents published by the previous administration and the Irish Government in February 1995 provide a reasonable basis for discussion, but these issues are all for consideration in the multi-party negotiations and can only be taken forward by agreement among the parties and subject to a referendum in Northern Ireland.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

16. **Dr. Vis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland. [1393]

24. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the viability of small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland. [1401]

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment she has made of the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland. [1379]

Mr. Ingram: The Small Business Agency for Northern Ireland, LEDU, has just published its results for 1996–97, recording its best year to date in terms of the performance of its client companies.

The 1996 survey of LEDU client companies revealed a net increase in employment of 3,710 jobs; an increase of 11 per cent. over the previous year well ahead of overall national and regional trends for the fifth consecutive year. In addition LEDU assisted 1,543 new businesses to start-up during 1996–97, 136 of which represented

businesses with potential to engage in future export led growth; an increase of 72 per cent. over the past two years.

Marches

20. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action she *(a)* has taken and *(b)* proposes to take, to implement the recommendations of the North commission regarding marches. [1397]

Mr. Ingram: As set out in the Queen's speech, the Government is committed to bringing forward legislation on parades, which will fully reflect the analysis in the North Report. Our overriding principle is to uphold the rule of law, creating new structures to respect all the rights at issue. The legislation will draw upon the experience of this marching season, to achieve any enhancements which are possible to the proposed measures in the North Report.

Parades

21. **Ms Hewitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has to help reduce tensions over parades in Northern Ireland. [1398]

23. **Mr. Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals she intends to bring forward to reduce tensions relating to parades. [1400]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friends the Members for Wigan (Mr. Stott) and for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow).

Bloody Sunday

26. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations she has received concerning Bloody Sunday; and if she will make a statement. [1403]

Marjorie Mowlam: We have received four letters on "Bloody Sunday", two from the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign, one from the Standing Committee on Human Rights and one from a Member of this House. We have also received eight letters from members of the public. I do not think it appropriate to make a statement at this time.

Carers

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps she plans to take to ensure that carers are informed of *(a)* their rights and *(b)* the opportunities for a carer's assessment. [2492]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* Health and Social Services Boards and Trusts were directed by the Department to offer carers a separate assessment of their own needs if so requested from 1 April 1996. *Guidance on Carers' Assessments,* issued in February 1996, requires Trusts to determine their criteria for separate carers' assessments; to update their publicity material to include separate assessment for carers; and to put in place arrangements to ensure that all concerned are made aware of the criteria for obtaining such assessments. The Department will continue to monitor the implementation of the guidance as part of its Regional Strategy monitoring arrangements.

Education Funding

Mr. Roy Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has for additional funding for education in Northern Ireland. [1523]

Mr. Worthington: The Government has begun a Comprehensive Spending Review to ensure that, within the published plans for 1997–98 and 1998–99, expenditure is aligned with the Government's priorities, including education. We have already reallocated £4 million to address the problems facing schools in 1997–98. Decisions on the Comprehensive Spending Review will help to inform allocations in future years.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Forsythe: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Child Support Agency cases were finalised by the Belfast Office of the Agency between 1 April 1996 and 1 April 1997. [1524]

Mr. Worthington: Responsibility for the subject in question has been delegated to the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency under its Chief Executive, Mr. Patrick Devlin. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Pat Devlin to Mr. Clifford Forsythe, dated 11 June 1997:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question about the number of cases finalised by the Belfast Office between 1 April 1996 and 1 April 1997.

The number of applications cleared by the Northern Ireland Child Support Agency between 1 April 1996 and 31 March 1997 was as follows:

	Number
Applications assessed	4,335
Applications cleared without assessment	5,299
Total	9,634

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of MRSA have been recorded in each health authority district in Northern Ireland in each of the last 12 months. [2982]

Mr. Worthington: This information is not available centrally.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans she has for fundamental changes within the Royal Ulster Constabulary; what plans she has for consultation in this respect; and if she will make a statement. [1380]

Mr. Ingram: We want the Chief Constable's Fundamental Review implemented. We will also bring forward proposals on the tripartite structure, and on police complaints. We will consult widely about possible improvements to community police links, and aim for comprehensive parliamentary scrutiny of these proposals. Taken together our proposals represent an effective

response, appropriate to Northern Ireland, to growing public expectations both within the UK and beyond of what the Police Service can deliver.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE

Mrs. McGuire: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date the most recently born bovine animal with BSE was born; and if he will make a statement. [3508]

Dr. John Cunningham: BSE has been confirmed in a Highland cow born in Wales on 17 January 1994. This animal was two years and 10 months old when clinical signs were first observed. This is the first case of BSE in an animal born in 1994 but is unlikely to be the last as the risk of exposure through feed was not significantly different in the early months of 1994 compared with the closing months of 1993 when cases have already been confirmed. The dam of this particular cow is still alive and shows no signs of BSE.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what scientific advice he has received on preventing BSE infected beef being imported from Germany; and what steps he is taking to implement such advice. [2484]

Mr. Rooker: SEAC considered the issue of bovine imports into the UK, taking into account the Commission's assessment of surveillance and controls in other Member States, and advised Ministers on 2 June. I refer the right hon. Member to the Statement made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 5 June (*Official Report*, Columns *227–28*).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the comparative effectiveness of eliminating BSE in cattle of *(a)* the 30 month scheme and *(b)* the selective cull. [2800]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer given on 10 June 1997]:* The Over Thirty Months Scheme (OTMS) is a measure to protect public health, not to eliminate BSE. On the other hand, the selective cull is aimed at reducing the number of cases of BSE by culling cattle which as young calves may have been exposed to the same feed as animals that have already succumbed to BSE. We estimate that the selective cull might prevent a maximum of 1,500 confirmed cases of BSE up to the end of 1999. The OTMS might prevent between one third and a half of that number, although the number of animals slaughtered under OTMS is many times greater than under the selective cull.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his assessment of the use of BSE-testing developments by Messrs Proteus. [2248]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's involvement with Proteus has been confined to the assessment of a PrP antiserum for the diagnosis of BSE by immunohistochemistry in brain sections of cattle killed with clinical signs of BSE.

In a joint study between the Veterinary Research Laboratories, Dublin and the Central Veterinary Laboratory (CVL), Weybridge, the performance of the Proteus PrP antiserum, designated 168, was compared with that of another PrP antiserum 971 raised at CVL. Each laboratory replicated the PrP immunostaining protocols used in both participating laboratories. Closely similar results were obtained in each laboratory with both antibodies performing similarly in the confirmation of clinical cases of BSE.

The studies did not include evaluation of the use of the 168 antibody for the diagnosis of BSE during the incubation period of the disease.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects SEAC to have completed its consideration and given its advice on the European Commission's march draft report on risk factors and surveillance procedures on BSE in the community. [2249]

Mr. Rooker: SEAC considered the European Commission's draft report and advised Ministers on 2 June. I would refer my hon. Friend to SEAC's statement which was placed in the Library of the House on 5 June.

Bread and Flour Regulations

Mrs. McGuire: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reasons the Government is planning to replace the Bread and Flour Regulations 1995; and if he will make a statement. [3507]

Mr. Rooker: European law requires draft national legislation to be notified to the European Commission (and through them to other member states) to ensure that it does not introduce new technical barriers to trade. The Bread and Flour Regulations 1995 were a simplification of earlier Regulations. They did not introduce any new standards and at the time it was considered that they did not need to be notified.

However, the ECJ has recently ruled that even a simplification of existing Regulations should be subject to the notification procedure.

The European Commission has indicated that it considers the Bread and Flour Regulations 1995 to be technically in breach of Community law and the Government has therefore agreed to revoke and remake them in accordance with EU notification procedures.

Draft Regulations are now being issued for public consultation. They revoke and re-enact the Bread and Flour Regulations 1995 and incorporate amendments made by the Bread and Flour (Amendment Regulations) 1996.

Common Agriculture Policy

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what scope there is in the existing CAP structure for redirecting United Kingdom agricultural support toward more sustainable practices including argi-environmental based subsidies; what are the main administrative and policy changes required for argi-environmental CAP reform to be feasible on a European-wide basis; and if he will make a statement. [2642]

Mr. Rooker: CAP rules on farm supports, with few exceptions, allow no discretion to Member States to vary the rates of payment. Reform of the CAP as advocated by the Government would result in due course in EU expenditure savings, some of which should be directed towards well-defined agri-environmental objectives.

Pesticides

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the active ingredients in common use within pesticides have no safety data; and if he will make a statement. [2629]

Mr. Rooker: All pesticides must be approved by Ministers before they may be marketed or used in the United Kingdom. The Pesticides Safety Directorate in my Department takes the lead in evaluating agricultural pesticides and holds safety data on all active ingredients used in approved agricultural pesticides. The Health and Safety Executive plays a similar role for non-agricultural pesticides.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many different pesticides products are on the market; how many active ingredients they are formulated from; of those active ingredients how many are *(a)* in common use and *(b)* adequately tested; and if he will make a statement. [2627]

Mr. Rooker: Approximately 3,700 pesticide products are currently approved for use in agriculture and the home garden. The number of active ingredients contained in one or more of these products is approximately 340.

There is no clear definition of "common use". Levels of active ingredient used will change substantially as new chemicals replace old ones and will vary year by year according to factors such as pest pressures and weather patterns. So far as agricultural uses are concerned, the weights of active ingredients and crop areas treated are monitored and published as Pesticide Usage Surveys.

No active ingredient may be included in an approved pesticide until it has been assessed according to current standards. In addition, under United Kingdom and EC arrangements, programmes to review, "old" active ingredients are carried out to ensure that supporting data packages are brought up to modern standards.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many of the pesticides in common use in the United Kingdom are possible *(a)* carcinogens, *(b)* mutagens and *(c)* allergens; and if he will make a statement. [2631]

Mr. Rooker: There are a number of different classification systems for mutagens, carcinogens and allergens. These are mainly based in a laboratory assessment of the innate hazard of the compound.

Pesticides are approved following a thorough evaluation by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides of the risk that they pose in use. This assessment looks not only at the laboratory estimate of hazard but also at the conditions of use and the consequent exposure of operators, bystanders, food consumers and the environment. If the risk is acceptably small, approval can be granted.

Because the pesticides regulatory system is focused upon acctual risk rather than potential hazard, the figures requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information is *(a)* held and *(b)* regularly gathered on the health effects of pesticides; how this information is collected; and if he will make a statement. [2628]

Mr. Rooker: Pesticides are approved on the basis of scientific information supplied by applicant companies; health effects are a key part of this data package. Companies are also required to supply any data that they subsequently generate or receive that may indicate a need to reconsider the risk assessment.

The Health and Safety Executive collect and investigate reports of incidents involving agricultural pesticides. The Department carries out and publishes a comprehensive programme of monitoring of pesticide residues in food and the results are considered by the Working Party on Pesticides Residues, a sub-group of the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

Food (Colourings)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list those artificial colours permitted for use in food within the United Kingdom; if he will indicate those which are banned in *(a)* the USA and *(b)* Norway; and if he will make a statement. [2630]

Mr. Rooker: The following artificial colours are permitted for use in food within the United Kingdom:

EC number	*Name*
E 102	Tartrazine
E 104	Quinoline Yellow
E 110	Sunset Yellow FCFOrange Yellow S
E 122	Azorubine, Carmoisine
E 123	Amaranth
E 124	Ponceau 4R, Cochineal Red A
E 127	Erythrosine
E 128	Red 2G
E 129	Allura Red AC
E 131	Patent Blue V
E 132	Indigotine, Indigo carmine
E 133	Brilliant Blue FCF
E 142	Green S
E 151	Brilliant Black BN, Black PN
E 153	Vegetable carbon
E 154	Brown FK
E 155	Brown HT
E 170	Calcium carbonate
E 171	Titanium dioxide
E 172	Iron oxides and hydroxides
E 173	Aluminium
E 174	Silver
E 175	Gold
E 180	Litholrubine BK

All of these have been approved under harmonised rules which apply throughout the EU, following safety clearance by the European Commission's Scientific Committee for Food. The information requested about bans which may exist in the USA and Norway is not readily available. I will write to my hon. Friend.

Animal Feed

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many and what percentage of feed compounders currently list full ingredients when labelling animal feeding contents; and if he will make a statement. [2694]

Mr. Rooker: A survey by UKASTA, the trade association representing compound feed manufacturers, has indicated that around 90 per cent. of the animal feed manufactured by its members is now subject to full ingredient listing. The Government is continuing to monitor the situation and will take action if necessary.

Beef

Mr. Prior: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what actions he plans to take to support *(a)* beef prices and *(b)* the beef production industry. [2530]

Mr. Rooker: The current problems of the UK beef market are not simply the result of BSE, but reflect the fact that there is significant structural imbalance between supply and demand on the EU market. In discussion with Commissioner Fischler and representatives of other Member States on the Agriculture Council, the Government has repeatedly stressed that reform of the beef regime is urgently necessary to address that imbalance. In the meantime, we are urging the Commission to make progress towards lifting the export ban and to introduce controls on beef production in other Member States equivalent to those applied here. In the absence of agreement on such controls, we will not hesitate to take unilateral action to ensure that any beef imported onto the UK market and competing with the domestic product meets the same high standards as apply in the UK.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement as to the difference in treatment by the regulatory authorities of *(a)* imported beef and *(b)* beef produced in the United Kingdom. [2246]

Mr. Rooker: All fresh meat produced in or imported into the United Kingdom must be produced in accordance with harmonised hygiene rules laid down in Council Directive 64/433/EEC (as amended). Also, meat derived from bovines which, at the time of slaughter, were more than 30 months old is prohibited under the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No 2) Regulations 1996 for sale for human consumption unless it comes from animals covered by the Beef Assurance Scheme, or born, reared and slaughtered in those third countries specifically excluded by the Regulations where there is no known risk of BSE.

In addition, since 1989 there has been a requirement for specified bovine material (SBM) to be removed from bovine animals which have died or been slaughtered in the United Kingdom. SBM is currently defined in the Specified Bovine Material Order 1997 as the whole head (excluding the tongue), spinal cord, spleen, thymus, tonsils and intestines of cattle over six months old and the thymus and intestines of calves under six months. The SBM may not be used in food, animal feed, cosmetic, pharmaceutical or medical products. It has to be stained and disposed of under strictly controlled conditions.

On 5 June, following advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee, my right hon. Friend, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced the opening of consultations on an amendment to the 1997 Order, *Official Report*, columns *227–28*, which would extend these controls to imported beef, other than from those countries excluded by the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) (No 2) Regulations 1996. This is not an import ban. We intend to implement these measures in late July if agreement to introduce similar Community-wide controls is not forthcoming by then.

Newcastle Disease

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total amount of compensation to be paid by his Department as a result of the *(a)* Ross on Wye and *(b)* Sussex outbreaks of Newcastle disease in 1996–97; and if he will make a statement. [2692]

Mr. Rooker: The Department has paid £1,559,803 to date in respect of three outbreaks of Newcastle disease near Ross on Wye and £21,235 for two outbreaks in Sussex which occurred during 1996–97. A further sum of about £300,000 in compensation is expected to be paid in connection with one of the outbreaks near Ross on Wye.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment his Department has made of the reasons behind the 1996–97 outbreaks of Newcastle disease in *(a)* Ross on Wye and *(b)* Sussex; and if he will make a statement. [2693]

Mr. Rooker: The State Veterinary Service has conducted an epidemiological investigation into the cause of three outbreaks of Newcastle disease in Ross on Wye and one in Sussex which occurred in January this year. It has not been possible to confirm either a definitive source for the infection or how the virus had spread between premises. However, it is believed that the virus may have originated from migrating birds and was subsequently spread between premises by the movement of people, vehicles or equipment.

An outbreak of Newcastle disease in a pheasant farm in Sussex in May 1996 was attributed to contact with wild pigeons or doves which were infected with the PMV1 virus.

Milk Quotas

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department insists on duly completed milk quota transfer forms being submitted before proceeding with dairy produce quota regulation apportionment. [2482]

Mr. Rooker: Yes. However, in cases where the parties are in dispute as to the apportionment of quota or where the Intervention Board has reasonable grounds for believing that a correct apportionment of quota may not have been made, the Dairy Produce Quotas Regulations 1997 provide for the matter to be referred to arbitration. Once the arbitrator has arrived at his decision on the appropriate apportionment, the quota register held by the Intervention Board will be amended, if required, in accordance with the arbitrator's findings.

Food Safety

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that imported foodstuffs meet the same safety criteria as required of home grown foodstuffs. [2483]

Mr. Rooker: Where harmonised Community rules exist, imports must comply with the EU legislation designed to protect public and animal health. Where there are no harmonised rules, imports must comply with national importation rules. Control checks are carried out at the port of importation for products from third countries and at retail level.

Food Additives

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of food additives in use in the United Kingdom are regulated by the EU; and if he will make a statement. [2634]

Mr. Rooker: Harmonised EU rules have now been introduced for the vast majority of food additives in use in the United Kingdom. These include all colours, sweeteners, flavourings and extraction solvents and 24 classes of miscellaneous additives. Harmonised rules for the use of flour treatment agents are currently being discussed. Only a very few miscellaneous additives and some carrier solvents now remain subject to national controls only.

Processed Food

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of food consumed in the United Kingdom is processed food; and if he will make a statement. [2636]

Mr. Rooker: Virtually all foodstuffs undergo some form of processing before sale to consumers. If my hon. Friend has a particular concern, perhaps he will write to me.

Canine Spongiform Encephalopathies

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of recent research regarding canine spongiform encephalopathies; and if he will make a statement. [2633]

Mr. Rooker: No cases of transmissible spongiform encephalopathy have been confirmed in canines.

We are aware of a case of a Norwegian dog showing a spongiform change in the brain. We have sought clarification from the Norwegian authorities on the results of their investigation into this case.

Quota Hopping

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress towards resolving the problem of quota hopping. [3025]

Mr. Morley: There have been extensive discussions with the Commission and others in recent weeks about measures to deal with quota hopping. Progress is being made and we expect to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Genetically Modified Organisms

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce measures to require processed food to be labelled to indicate whether it contains any material which has been genetically engineered; and if he will make a statement. [2932]

Mr. Rooker: I will be pressing at European level for all foods which may contain genetically modified ingredients to be clearly labelled so as to give consumers a real choice in what they buy.

Tuberculosis

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 22 May, *Official Report*, columns *167-69*, what conclusions his Department has drawn from that evidence on the responsibility of badgers for the transmission of TB to cattle. [2247]

Mr. Rooker: There is a great deal of circumstantial evidence that badgers are implicated in the transmission of bovine tuberculosis to cattle. Professor Krebs is looking at the incidence of tuberculosis in cattle and badgers and assessing the scientific evidence for the links between them. I expect him to report later this year. We will consider any recommendations Professor Krebs makes very carefully.

Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy towards environmentally sensitive area schemes in England; and what is *(a)* the budget currently available for ESAs, *(b)* the number of farmers and landowners entered into each ESA scheme, *(c)* the area of land so entered and *(d)* the number of project officers employed to promote schemes. [2685]

Dr. John Cunningham: A total of £34.8 million has been allocated for payments to English ESA agreement holders in the current financial year.

The number of farmers and landowners and the area of land entered into the English ESAs at the end of the 1996 application period are shown in the attached table. MAFF Regional Service Centres are currently processing applications made during the 1997 window.

The English ESA scheme is currently supported by 29 ESA Project Officers and 16 Assisted Project Officers.

Number of agreements and area of land entered into English environmentally sensitive areas at the end of 1996 scheme year

ESA	*Number of hectares under ESA agreement*	*Number of ESA agreements*
Pennine Dales	26,616	789
South Downs	11,563	247
Somerset Levels and Moors	14,998	996
The Broads	15,818	805
West Penwith	6,308	199
Breckland	5,692	129
Suffolk River Valleys	9,515	495
Clun	14,652	215
North Peak	40,383	94
Test Valley	1,331	49
North Kent Marshes	4,065	67

Number of agreements and area of land entered into English environmentally sensitive areas at the end of 1996 scheme year

ESA	*Number of hectares under ESA agreement*	*Number of ESA agreements*
Avon Valley	1,023	56
South Wessex Downs	20,279	147
Exmoor	45,766	494
South West Peak	20,005	527
Lake District	114,437	1,047
Blackdown Hills	8,614	331
Cotswold Hills	43,283	622
Dartmoor	19,172	504
Essex Coast	3,080	105
Shropshire Hills	14,127	292
Upper Thames Tributaries	5,074	221
Total	445,801	8,431

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the species and habitats included as performance indicators for English ESAs and the specific objectives relating to each; and if he will make a statement concerning the progress made by farmers in respect of those species and habitats. [2686]

Dr. Cunningham: Five year objectives and targets for each of the 22 English Environmentally Sensitive Areas have been produced and copies of these have been placed in the Library of the House. These include targets for specific habitats and species.

A summary of the results of a comprehensive programme of monitoring of the five Stage I ESAs, launched in 1987, was presented as evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee Enquiry into ESAs last year. (Ref HC 45-II pages 10–14). This describes the achievements for targets set up to 1997.

Reports on the environmental monitoring of the five Stage II ESAs, launched in 1988, and the six Stage III ESAs, launched in 1993, will be published later this summer and those on the first five years of the six Stage IV ESAs are expected to be available in the summer of 1998.

Revised objectives and targets for the Stage I ESAs for the period 1997–2002, reflecting targets under the Government's Biodiversity Action Plan, are in preparation and should be available in the Autumn.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the eligibility criteria for land managers who wish to enter the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; what financial limits are applied *(a)* annually and *(b)* over five years to applications for the scheme; and what is the total budget available over each of the next four years. [2687]

Dr. John Cunningham: The Countryside Stewardship Scheme is available throughout England, other than in Environmentally Sensitive Areas, to anyone who owns or manages land, including farmers and non-farming land managers, voluntary bodies, local authorities and community groups.

The annual financial limit for new agreements is £5 million. An additional provision of £0.5 million will be available for approvals in 1998 under a pilot scheme for arable land to be introduced as part of Countryside Stewardship.

The total budget for payments to farmers is £16.7 million for 1997–98, £22.1 million for 1998–99, and £26.7 million for each of the years 1999–2000 and 2000–2001.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2516]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him today by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department.

Pet Passports

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to introduce a trial passports for pets scheme to replace quarantine for animals from the EU and approved rabies free countries; and if he will make a statement. [2984]

Mr. Rooker: We are considering whether alternatives to quarantine might give equal or better protection against the importation of rabies.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 12 June 1997

HOME DEPARTMENT

Firearms

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the number of persons resident in the United Kingdom who are authorised to possess a firearm for their personal protection *(a)* under a certificate, permit or other form of authority issued in accordance with the Firearms Act 1968, *(b)* by virtue of being servants of the Crown and *(c)* by any other exemption or method of authorisation. [3295]

Mr. Michael: I have made no such estimate. Home Office guidance to the police in England, Wales and Scotland is that they should refuse applications for the grant of a firearm certificate for the applicant's protection or that of his premises. In Northern Ireland, there are approximately 11,000 people who hold certificates for firearms needed for personal protection. Information on the number of military personnel or other Crown servants currently authorised to retain service weapons for purposes of self-protection is not readily available.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many lives he estimates will be saved each year by the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997; and on what basis this estimate is made. [3297]

Mr. Michael: No such estimate can be prepared. The intention of the Act is to reduce the risk to public safety of another outrage such as that committed at Dunblane primary school by someone using a lawfully held handgun.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to place in the Library at monthly intervals a memorandum setting out the type and number of firearms which have been surrendered in accordance with the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 but which have not been destroyed, the reasons for not destroying them, the person or body to whom they have or are to be transferred and the price which has or is to be paid for them. [3299]

Mr. Michael: No. Police forces will retain handguns surrendered to them until compensation has been paid. We will report the overall outcome of the surrender exercise to the House but obtaining monthly reports on the lines suggested would be a time-consuming and expensive exercise which would not be justified. There will be no sales of surrendered handguns.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the total cost of introducing and implementing the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 and the present Firearms (Amendment) Bill. [3296]

Mr. Michael: The estimated total cost of implementing both the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997 and the Firearms (Amendment) Bill is £169 million. Of this figure, £138 million is the estimated cost of implementing the prohibition on higher-calibre handguns contained in the Act which includes the cost of compensation payments for these, for their accessories and the police and central administration costs. The remaining £31 million is the estimated cost of implementing the prohibition of small-calibre handguns envisaged by the Bill, including the cost of compensation payments for them and their accessories.

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made for the destruction of firearms surrendered to the police in accordance with the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1997. [3298]

Mr. Michael: Those firearms surrendered under the terms of the 1997 Act will be destroyed in accordance with local police arrangements. These will vary from force to force. A few firearms may be retained for police training purposes, and some may be taken by museums for public display.

Deportations

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been deported from the United Kingdom in each of the last five years. [2977]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The answer to the question is given in the following list.

Persons removed[1] from the United Kingdom under the deportation process, 1992–1996

1992: 2,583

1993: 2,285

1994: 1,870

1995: 1,893

1996[2] 1,889.

[1] *Includes voluntary departures after deportation action had been initiated.*

[2] *Provisional*

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deportation orders have been signed by Ministers in each of the last five years. [2990]

Mr. O'Brien: The information requested is given in the table:

Deportation Orders signed by Ministers, 1992–96.

1992: 887

1993: 1,245

1994: 1,514

1995: 1,648

1996[1]: 1,864.

[1] Provisional.

Freemasonry

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he is going to implement the Home Affairs Select Committee's recommendations on freemasonry in the police and the judiciary, with special reference to a public register of freemasons. [3000]

Mr. Michael: The Government are currently considering the Home Affairs Committee report on freemasonry in the police and the judiciary, and have written to the Clerk of the Committee to say that a substantive response to the Committee's recommendation will be made by the end of August this year.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 June, *Official Report*, columns *90–91*, if he will make a statement on the statistics published on 2 June, *Official Report*, column *91*, in respect of the decline in the percentage of eligible adults who are registered to vote over the last 20 years. [3072]

Mr. George Howarth: It is not possible to make a direct comparison between electoral registration figures and estimates of the resident population, because they are not compiled on the same basis. The 1997 electoral register for Great Britain published in February showed the highest ever number of parliamentary electors registered to vote and saw the largest annual increase since 1987. We will seek to encourage this continuing improvement in electoral registration.

Juvenile Offenders

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many juveniles aged 10 to 16 years were convicted in each offence group in each year since 1994. [2991]

Mr. Michael: Information from 1994 and 1995 is given in the table. 1996 data will not be available until the autumn.

Number of persons aged 10 to under 17 convicted at all courts by type of offence 1994 and 1995

England and Wales

Offence	*1994*	*1995*
Indictable offences		
Violence against the person	3,951	3,231
Sexual offences	322	301
Burglary	5,758	6,049
Robbery	1,204	1,466
Theft and handling stolen goods	11,043	12,267
Fraud and forgery	266	306
Criminal damage	1,461	1,583
Drug offences	471	600
Other (excluding motoring offences)	1,491	1,814
Motoring offences	158	175
Total Indictable offences	26,125	27,792
Summary non-motoring offences	8,046	10,393
Summary motoring offences	2,646	2,936
All offences	36,817	41,121

Tote

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current salary of the chairman of the Tote; when his appointment is due to end; and if he will make a statement. [2993]

Mr. George Howarth: The current salary of the chairman of the Tote is £103,108. Lord Wyatt's appointment is due to end on 30 June. We are taking steps to select a successor.

Police Forces (Chemical Agents)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which police forces in England and Wales use the MIBK chemical agent; [2769]

(2) if he will forbid the use of the chemical agent MIBK by police forces in England and Wales; [2770]

(3) what assessment he has made of representations from the Hertfordshire and Surrey Police regarding the MIBK chemical agent and its effect on foetuses. [2768]

Mr. Michael: My right hon. Friend does not plan to forbid the use of Methyl Isobutyl Ketone (MIBK) by police forces. MIBK is the solvent used as a carrying medium in CS canisters carried by officers in 17 forces in England and Wales. It has a wide range of uses, for example as a food additive and as a solvent in certain paints and varnishes. It is also found naturally in oranges, grapes and vinegar. A great deal is known about MIBK. The Department of Health has advised that it is an appropriate solvent to use in CS canisters, and it has been used by the Gendarmerie National in France for 17 years without any serious medical concerns.

There have been isolated reports published which suggest that at very high levels MIBK may affect unborn foetuses in lower mammals. These reports and the other available scientific evidence have been assessed by the Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch, the Department of Health and the Ministry of Defence. Their advice is that the scientific evidence does not indicate that MIBK is a human teratogen (that is to say, produces foetal abnormalities).

Police Training

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is standard procedure for United Kingdom police forces to provide firearms training systems that include training sequences designed to train police or other security personnel to fire on unarmed demonstrators; and if he will make a statement. [2775]

Mr. Michael: It would be entirely wrong for police forces not to train officers, or anyone else, to fire on unarmed demonstrators. The only circumstances in which police officers are trained to use a firearm against an unarmed person are training in the use of plastic baton rounds against people engaging in serious public disorder. Plastic baton rounds may be used as a last resort, where conventional methods of policing have been tried and failed or are unlikely to succeed if tried, and where the chief officer decides such action to be necessary because of the risk of loss of life or serious injury or widespread destruction of property where the damage may lead to serious risk of loss of life or serious personal injury. The police in the United Kingdom are trained to respond with the minimum force required to counter effectively any threat which they or members of the public come under. The use of force is governed by section 3 of the Criminal Law Act 1967 which provides that a person may use such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime. If my hon. Friend has any evidence

of any police force in the United Kingdom using such training sequences, I shall be grateful if she will let me have her evidence straightaway.

Alcoholic Drinks (Children)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to prevent the sale of mislabelled alcoholic drinks to children; and if he will make a statement. [2974]

Mr. George Howarth: The Government are very concerned about the promotion and sale of certain alcoholic drinks to children. My right hon. Friend has set up a Ministerial Group to look at the issue. As its chairman, I am holding urgent talks with the drinks industry to demand swift action. If we are not satisfied with the response we are prepared to take action ourselves.

A range of children's icepop drinks was recently found to have been contaminated with alcohol. The producer says that this was accidental and has withdrawn the product from the market.

Police Officers

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the overall increase in the numbers of *(a)* police officers of all ranks and *(b)* police constables in England and Wales over the period 1 April 1996 to 31 March 1997. [2965]

Mr. Michael: Provisional figures from police forces show that total police numbers increased by 257 to 127,158 in the 12 months ending March 1997. Within that total, police constable numbers increased by 460 to 98,132. These increases are well below the 1,000 additional officers planned by the previous Government last year.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Brussels on 26 and 27 May. [3978]

Mr. Straw: The Minister of State and I represented the United Kingdom at the Council. The main matters dealt with were as follows:

The Council agreed as "A" points, among other things, the Europol Drugs Unit budget for 1998, a joint action on co-operation on law and order and security, and a resolution on unaccompanied third-country national minors. Two actions covering Europol were also agreed, one covering how data will be stored and analysed and the other with the conditions of employment for Europol staff.

The Commission presented proposals for a future joint action on temporary protection for displaced persons. The proposals concern possible arrangements for European Union member states to respond in a co-ordinated way to situations where large numbers of refugees seek to enter the European Union from countries where events may have placed them in danger. In the light of preliminary discussion, the proposals will now be considered in detail in the appropriate working group.

There was discussion of a draft joint action aimed at providing an appropriately speedy mechanism for identifying and controlling new synthetic drugs throughout the Union. Establishment of such a mechanism was agreed in principle, although some work is still needed on the finer points of the text.

There was agreement in principle to a Protocol to the Europol Convention, which would lay down the extent to which Europol staff will benefit from certain privileges and immunities when carrying out their official functions. Minor amendments to the text are needed before the Protocol can be signed. This should be achieved fairly quickly.

Agreement was also reached on the second Protocol to the Convention on the Protection of the Communities' Financial Interests. This Protocol lays down steps to be taken by member states to criminalise certain acts of fraud and corruption against the Community budget and laundering of the proceeds of such fraud and corruption. The Protocol should be ready for signature in the near future.

The Presidency reported progress on the draft Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. Although some progress has been made, a number of issues remain to be finalised by the working group.

The Presidency reported the outcome of their meeting with representatives of the United States Government on 14 April, under the terms of the Transatlantic Dialogue. It was agreed that broad themes for ongoing co-operation should concentrate on the fight against terrorism; implementing of the Caribbean drugs initiative; and prevention of drug smuggling.

The Commission gave a summary of work under way to combat trafficking in women and children. This included projects under a number of European Union Justice and Home Affairs programmes, as well as on the role of voluntary organisations working in the field.

The Council also took note of reports on the work of the task force on organised crime in the Baltic region. The task force, which involves Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Finland, the Presidency and the Commission, has taken a number of concrete measures, including the establishment of 24-hour national contact points, joint communications systems and actions against stolen motor vehicles and drugs. It will report to heads of Government in January/February 1998.

Two new European Union Conventions were signed by Ministers. One covered arrangements for the Service in Member States of Judicial and Extra Judicial Documents in Civil and Commercial Matters, including a Protocol covering the role in these matters of the European Court of Justice. The other was the Convention on the Fight Against Corruption involving Officials of the European Communities or Officials of the Member States of the European Union.

Meetings were held with Ministers of the associated Central and Eastern European countries and, separately, with Cyprus. These concentrated on asylum, and covered in particular the application of the safe Third Country concept, public attitudes to asylum, and the possibility of a parallel convention to the Dublin Convention. The Dublin Convention lays down the procedure for

determining the state responsible for examining applications for asylum lodged in one of the member states of the European Communities. A parallel Convention would create a similar procedure for European Union member states and other contracting parties outside the Union.

Boards of Visitors Annual Report

Ms Keeble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has received a copy of the National Advisory Council for the Boards of Visitors Annual Report for 1996. [3987]

Ms Joyce Quin: We received an advance copy of the first annual report by the National Advisory Council on 29 May. It covers the period from 1 February 1996 to 31 January 1997. The report describes the varied and extensive programme of work carried out by the National Advisory Council on behalf of the Boards of Visitors. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

Animal Experimentation

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to introduce legislation to simplify and tighten the laws relating to animal testing wording on cosmetics labels in order to circumscribe ambiguous marketing. [2880]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

Requirements related to claims regarding animal testing of cosmetics will be tightened by regulation 4(4) of the Cosmetics Products (Safety) Regulations 1996, which will be enforced from 1 January 1998.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

ENVIRONMENT AND THE REGIONS

BSE Incinerators

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will issue guidance to planning inspectors to ensure that applications for BSE incinerators are not granted approval on appeal where they will destroy business confidence in a locality. [2477]

Mr. Raynsford: A number of recent planning applications have related to the construction of incineration facilities for the destruction of cattle slaughtered as part of the over 30 months scheme, rather than to those which show clinical signs of BSE for which provision exists already. Planning inspectors reach decisions on the basis of submitted evidence and published Government Planning Guidance. It is not appropriate to aim guidance solely at Planning Inspectors and on a single issue. Consideration is being given currently to whether there is a need to issue planning advice, to a wider audience, on facilities required to deal with wastes arising from the over 30 months scheme.

Elderly Care

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the funding allocated to Sefton Metropolitan borough council in the 1997–98 revenue support grant in respect of care of the elderly. [2480]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) on 10 June 1997, *Official Report,* column *405.*

Water Companies

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will include in his review of the abstraction licensing system new measures to ensure that water companies manage their aquifer resources sustainably; and if he will make a statement. [2789]

Angela Eagle: A key aim will be to ensure that the environment is properly protected, while providing fair and flexible arrangements for access to water resources by water companies to meet properly managed demands in a sustainable way. Amongst the possible measures which will be studied are economic instruments in relation to abstraction.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Gummer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and Regions what specific measures he plans to achieve the Government's target of a reduction in CO_2 emissions by 20 per cent. from 1990 levels by 2010. [2678]

Mr. Prescott: We are reviewing the United Kingdom's Climate Change Programme looking at policies and measures across all sectors which could contribute to a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from 1990 levels by 2010. These include improvements in areas such as domestic and industrial energy efficiency, measures to tackle emissions from the transport sector as part of the integrated transport strategy, and a large increase in the amount of electricity generated from renewable sources and combined heat and power schemes. We shall produce a revised programme after Kyoto.

Domestic Waste

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment Transport and the Regions (1) if he will bring forward a comprehensive policy for domestic waste reduction, with special reference to control of packaging, reuse of materials and recycling, developed within local authorities and voluntary groups in partnership; and if he will make a statement; [3001]

(2) if he will review all current proposals for waste incineration plants to establish *(a)* the health and environmental risks of emissions and *(b)* the extent to which the implementation of policies to improve recycling of domestic waste might reduce the need for incineration. [3002]

Angela Eagle: The Government will be looking carefully at existing practice and policy in the field of waste management, to see how the contribution from recycling and other means of recovering value from waste can be maximised. At present, only 6.5 per cent. of household waste is recycled, and only 12 per cent. of municipal waste has some value recovered from it. Local

authorities, voluntary groups, households and businesses all have a vital contribution to make in improving the sustainability of our waste management practices. Reduction of waste at source has an important part to play, and we hope to see the development of imaginative and effective initiatives to encourage it.

Current proposals for incineration plants will be considered, in the normal way, under the existing planning framework. We will keep under review the evidence on emissions from incinerators. It is essential that both new and existing incinerators meet stringent emissions standards to protect public health and the environment.

Non-domestic Rates

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to ensure that rateable businesses which temporarily cease to pay non-domestic rates due to the inability to trade for reasons of natural disasters are not treated as new accounts, which do not receive transitional relief, once they restart trading. [2824]

Mr. Raynsford: Properties removed from the rating list because they have been rendered incapable of occupation, for whatever reason, will necessarily require refurbishment or reconstruction, possibly to a higher standard than was the case before. We have no proposals to change the rule that such properties on re-entering the list should be denied transitional relief.

Council Tax

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many and what percentage of properties in Burnley are in (i) council tax band A and (ii) council tax band B. [2887]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is as follows:

Burnley: Dwellings on the Valuation List as at 16 October 1996

Band A	*Per cent. of total*	*Band B*	*Per cent. of total*
26,358	65.7	4,084	10.2

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which 50 local authorities in England have the highest percentage of properties in (i) council tax band A and (ii) council tax band B; and which 50 local authorities have the lowest percentage in those bands. [2888]

Mr. Raynsford: I have today placed the information in the Library of the House.

Development (Stevenage)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is his Department's policy regarding development west of Stevenage. [3058]

Mr. Raynsford: Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 states that releases of land from the Green Belt—like the proposals in Hertfordshire County Council's Structure Plan Review for development west of Stevenage—should take place only in exceptional circumstances. It will be for the County Council to respond to the recommendations of the independent Panel who conducted an examination in public of the Structure Plan Review proposals in March. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minster will consider that response before taking a view on whether the case for any Green Belt releases has been made.

Housing Corporation

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to meet the chief executive and chairman of the Housing Corporation; and if he will make a statement. [3059]

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Local Government and Housing and I met the Chief Executive and Chairman of the Housing Corporation on 2 June. We had a fruitful and informative discussion about the work and role of the Corporation and we look forward to working together in the coming months.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the current level of set-aside capital receipts derived from the sale of council houses for each local authority in Essex. [3010]

Mr. Raynsford: The amounts of housing capital receipts which were set aside by each local authority in Essex between 1990–91 and 1995–96 are set out in the table. However, individual authorities may have used these set-aside receipts to repay debt or in lieu of further borrowing, and so may no longer retain them in the form of cash and investments.

	Receipts setaside from sales of Housing Revenue Account assets 1990–91 to 1995–96 £000s
Basildon	10,465
Braintree	13,072
Brentwood	5,404
Castle Point	2,588
Chelmsford	13,172
Colchester	11,629
Epping Forest	14,694
Harlow	27,644
Maldon	15,346
Rochford	2,295
Southend-on-Sea	7,330
Tendring	4,588
Thurrock	17,017
Uttlesford	6,931

Note:

Source of data: HRA subsidy claim forms.

We will be consulting the Local Government Association and local authorities on the Government's Capital Receipts Initiative in due course. No decision about the basis on which resources are to be distributed to individual authorities will be made until that consultation process is complete.

Contaminated Land

Ms Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what financial support he is giving in the current year to English local authorities and to the Environment Agency to meet capital costs of site investigation and remediation of contaminated land. [3183]

Angela Eagle: The Department of the Environment's Contaminated Land Supplementary Credit Approval programme, which has a budget of £14 million in the current financial year, provides support for capital costs incurred by English local authorities where they are responsible for the investigation or remediation of contaminated land. The programme also is able to provide support, in the form of additional grant-in-aid, to the Environment Agency where it is carrying out works to deal with water pollution from contaminated land.

The programme is aimed at tackling problems on sites owned by local authorities or those where authorities or the Environment Agency have responsibility to take action and cannot recover their costs from third parties. The Department operates an assessment and prioritisation procedure to ensure that the available funding goes to projects representing the greatest threat to health or the environment.

Some authorities have already been notified of support, where this is to meet on-going contractual commitments for projects funded in previous years. The Department of the Environment has today written to local authorities with successful bids for new projects and to the Environment Agency, notifying them of the financial allocations which are being made.

The following table sets out the allocations which have been made for the current financial year.

Local Authority	*Number of sites*	*Total allocation (£)*
Bassetlaw DC	1	120,000
Birmingham City	2	35,000
Blackburn and Darwen BC	2	20,000
Blackpool BC	1	1,000
Bradford MBC	1	30,000
Brighton and Hove C	1	30,000
Bury MBC	1	492,000
Cambridgeshire CC	2	89,000
Cheltenham BC	1	293,000
Cheshire CC	2	170,000
Chorley BC	3	22,000
Cornwall CC	2	42,000
Croydon LB	2	157,000
Cumbria CC	2	75,000
Darlington BC	1	279,000
Devon CC	2	445,000
Dudley MBC	4	193,000
Essex CC	2	410,000
Gateshead MBC	4	765,000
Greater Manchester WDA	1	99,000
Guildford BC	2	147,000
Hampshire CC	2	408,000
Hartlepool BC	1	9,000
Hereford and Worcester CC	2	91,000
Hounslow LB	5	313,000
Knowsley MBC	1	171,000
Leicester City	5	582,000
Leicestershire CC	1	880,000
Merseyside WDA	3	510,000
Middlesbrough BC	1	250,000
Newcastle City	1	56,000
Norfolk CC	2	188,000
Northamptonshire CC	2	675,000
North East Lincolnshire C	1	136,000
North Lincolnshire C	1	770,000
Northumberland CC	2	12,000
Norwich City	1	1,789,000
Nuneaton and Bedworth	3	90,000
Oldham MBC	1	10,000
Oxford City	1	1,271,000
Oxfordshire CC	1	5,000
Portsmouth City	4	163,000
Redbridge LB	1	22,000
Rotherham MBC	3	348,000
St. Helens MBC	1	23,000
Sandwell MBC	20	277,000
Sheffield City	1	559,000
Solihull MBC	1	535,000
Stafford BC	1	25,000
Stockton-on-Tees BC	1	12,000
Surrey CC	6	1,278,000
Tameside MBC	1	67,000
Three Rivers DC	1	4,000
Trafford MBC	3	77,000
Walsall MBC	3	205,000
Warwickshire CC	1	450,000
West Yorkshire WDA	6	651,000
Weymouth and Portland BC	1	750,000
Worcester City	1	26,000
Environment Agency	6	500,000

Note:

Total allocations include an over-programming margin against the total budget to allow for slippage in expenditure on individual projects.

Gazumping

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will consider changes to the law to prevent gazumping and the late withdrawal from house purchase agreements. [2478]

Mr. Hoon: I have been asked to reply as responsibility for this topic lies with the LCD.

Work will shortly be under way across a number of Government Departments co-operating together which will look closely at the problem of gazumping and will lead to detailed proposals which will be in the interests of everyone involved in the sale and purchase of homes.

HSE Prosecutions

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the number of prosecutions which the Health and Safety Executive has brought against each local authority in England in the last three years; and how many have resulted in convictions. [3252]

Angela Eagle: In the three years from 1993–94 to 1995–96, the Health and Safety Executive prosecuted local authorities in England 44 times for 51 alleged breaches of health and safety law and secured 50 convictions. Details from HSE records are shown in the table. Figures for the year April 1996–March 1997 are not yet available.

Local authority	Occasions prosecuted	Breaches alleged	Convictions
Wealden District Council	1	1	1
East Sussex County Council	1	1	1
London Borough of Islington	1	1	1
St. Edmundsbury Borough Council	1	1	1
Norwich City Council	1	1	1
Stevenage Borough Council	1	1	1
Salford Borough Council	1	1	1
Lancaster City Council	1	1	1
Sunderland City Council	1	1	1
Avon County Council	1	1	1
Somerset County Council	1	1	0
London Borough of Southwark	1	1	1
City of Birmingham	1	1	1
Bromsgrove District Council	1	2	2
Doncaster Borough Council	1	1	1
Harrogate District Council	1	1	1
Manchester City Council	2	2	2
Elmbridge Borough Council	1	1	1
Durham County Council	1	1	1
South Tyneside Borough Council	1	1	1
Gateshead Borough Council	1	1	1
Lancashire County Council	1	1	1
Cleveland County Council	1	1	1
Surrey County Council	1	1	1
London Borough of Harrow	2	4	4
Colchester Borough Council	1	1	1
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	1	1	1
St. Helens Borough Council	1	1	1
Berkshire County Council	1	1	1
London Borough of Greenwich	2	2	2
Cornwall County Council	1	1	1
London Borough of Haringey	1	2	2
London Borough of Barking and Dagenham	1	1	1
London Borough of Redbridge	1	1	1
Corporation of London	1	3	3
Bedford Borough Council	1	1	1
Wrekin Council	1	1	1
Newark and Sherwood District Council	1	1	1
Humberside County Council	1	2	2
Rochdale Borough Council	1	1	1
Liverpool City Council	1	1	1

These figures have not been validated.

There have, of course, been successive cuts to the HSE's grant-in-aid over recent years. Despite considerable difficulty, HSE has sought to meet these budget reductions with least harm to its key areas of work such as inspection and other field activity. Nevertheless, this can lead to heavy workloads associated with prosecution, discouraging it—especially when pitifully low fines from magistrates are taken into account. We are looking closely at this.

TRANSPORT

Rail Regulations

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the arrangements in place currently for claims handling in respect of claims against operators of rail services, with particular reference to the experiences of those persons submitting claims arising out of the Rickerscote rail crash at Stafford on 8 March 1996. [2862]

Ms Glenda Jackson: The arrangements for claims handling are governed by the Claims Allocation and Handling Agreement (CAHA), which is currently being reviewed by the Rail Industry Disputes Resolution Committee—a committee of industry representatives with an independent Chairman. Their proposals for changes to the Agreement will be submitted to the Rail Regulator for approval.

The Rail Regulator has initiated a separate review of third party liability insurance in relation to "privately owned rail vehicles" (defined as ones which are both owned by a company outside the licensing regime of the Railways Act 1993 and which are operated without the benefit of a lease or other agreement which transfers liability for the vehicle to a licensed train operator). He believes that it is in the interests of both the rail industry and third parties that a practical solution is found to the third party liability issues surrounding such vehicles. I understand the Rail Regulator intends to publish a consultation document later this year.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what public liability insurance is required of *(a)* Railtrack plc, *(b)* licensed operators of rail services and *(c)* other operators of rail services. [2861]

Ms Jackson: Licensed operators, including Railtrack, are required by the Rail Regulator to carry third party liability cover of at least £155 million, unless the Regulator agrees a lower figure in specific circumstances. In the case of companies providing services to the rail network who fall outside the Regulator's licensing powers, the level of third party liability insurance is a matter of commercial judgment. However, in the case of unlicensed contractors and sub-contractors, the Regulator has required licensed operators to provide, in their own insurance, cover for the difference between the contractor's insurance and £155 million.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what regulatory framework governs claims procedures in respect of the franchised railway companies; and what role the Rail Regulator has in respect of them. [2863]

Ms Jackson: All licensed railway operators, including Railtrack, are required by their licences to be a party to claims handling arrangements approved by the Rail Regulator. The railway industry established the Claims Allocation and Handling Agreement (CAHA) in early

1994. This continues to be the means by which all operators fulfil this licence obligation. The Rail Regulator is responsible for enforcing licence conditions.

Cycling

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what policies are being pursued by the Government to encourage cycling; and if he will make a statement. [3049]

Ms Glenda Jackson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 3 June, *Official Report*, column *165:* to the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane).

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will meet the Rail Regulator to discuss whether adequate provision for the transport of cycles should be added to the obligations of train operators; and if he will make a statement. [3048]

Ms Jackson: The provision of capacity for the carriage of bicycles is a matter for the Franchising Director. Franchise operators are required by their Franchise Agreements to ensure that facilities are made available for the carriage of cycles on trains, so far as is reasonably practicable and subject to the availability of appropriate space on their rolling stock.

The Government are keen to see proper facilities for cyclists who wish to use the railway. We are currently reviewing the Franchising Director's Objectives, Instructions and Guidance. As part of our review, we will be considering what action the Franchising Director should take to encourage increased carriage of cycles on trains.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Credit Card Fraud

Mr. Richard Allan: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans she has to help businesses protect themselves against the losses caused by fraudulent credit card usage, with particular reference to telephone transactions. [2816]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: I understand that the banks are actively working with retail organisations to investigate methods of preventing all types of credit card fraud, including telephone transactions, and I strongly welcome this initiative.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what percentage and how many documents in 1996 she estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by her Department in full, *(d)* retained by her Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2506]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 11 June 1997]:* No document falls due for transfer to the Public Record Office until it is 30 years old. The suitability of a document for selection for permanent preservation under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958 will be reviewed during that period.

The Act does not require statistics to be kept in the form requested. To do so would incur disproportionate cost. However, in order to comply with their duties under the Act, departments are obliged to make arrangements for the safekeeping of their records, with a view to their possible selection and transfer to the Public Record Office and eventual release to the public. The general arrangements for extended closure or retention of public records are set out in Chapter 9 of the White Paper Open Government of July 1993 (CM.2290).

Lloyd's

Mr. Cousins: To ask the President of the Board of Trade if she will review the decision of the last Government not to hold an independent judicial inquiry into the financial affairs of Lloyd's of London. [2962]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 11 June 1997]:* I have given careful consideration to the question of an enquiry into the past problems of Lloyd's of London ("Lloyd's").

I recognise the hardship suffered by many underwriting members of Lloyd's ("Names") as a result of the losses at Lloyd's in the late 1980s and early 1990s, despite suggestions that for the most part, the losses can be attributed to a series of natural and man-made disasters. Moreover, a number of adverse rulings in the courts in the United States extended the scope of policies underwritten at Lloyd's to cover certain asbestosis and pollution risks which were never envisaged when the policies were written. The position was worsened by the so-called "LMX" spiral, where syndicates and reinsurance companies in the London Market repeatedly reinsured one another at a time of poor market conditions. The various losses have been thoroughly investigated in some 27 independent reviews. Under the circumstances, it seems unlikely that further investigations will identify any information beyond that which is already known.

Some Names have suggested that they were the victims of fraud. None of the independent loss reviews, or the investigations carried out by my Department and the Serious Fraud Office, has uncovered any evidence sufficient to justify the institution of proceedings. Although people have claimed to have such evidence, they have consistently refused to make it available to my Department for examination. Of course, if anyone provides any new evidence to me, I shall consider it very carefully and act accordingly.

There are a number of other practical considerations which I have taken into account.

As the Companies Acts are not relevant to the Society of Lloyd's, the only powers available to instigate an investigation are powers under the Tribunals of Enquiry (Evidence) Act 1921. This is an extremely costly procedure which cannot be justified on the basis of the hearsay evidence available to me and when previous investigations, conducted much nearer the time, failed to produce any proper evidence. I also note that, given the complexity of the Lloyd's market, it could take many years to complete the process. The alternative would be an administrative enquiry which would have no powers to

require the production of evidence and would therefore have to rely on the goodwill of the people against whom the allegations have been made.

With regard to improved regulatory standards for the future, I note there have been substantial changes to the regulatory arrangements since the events in question. The Government will be considering further the future regulatory arrangements for Lloyd's but I am afraid I do not believe that a further enquiry into past events will materially help that consideration.

Under the circumstances, I do not, therefore, propose to establish a public enquiry.

VAT (Fuel)

Mr. Gummer: To ask the President of the Board of Trade how she plans to counteract the effect on fuel consumption and emissions of the promised reduction in VAT on fuel. [2677]

Mr. Battle: We have already announced a review of policy to see what would be necessary and practicable to achieve 10 per cent. of UK's electricity needs from renewables by the year 2010. We have also announced a fundamental transport policy review and the need to promote energy conservation. We are reviewing the United Kingdom's Climate Change Programme, looking at policies and measures across all sectors which could contribute to a 20 per cent. reduction in carbon dioxide emissions from 1990 levels by 2010.

Unfair Dismissal

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the President of the Board of Trade for what reasons Her Majesty's Government are not bringing forward legislation to vary the qualifying period for unfair dismissal in the current session of Parliament. [2997]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government has no plans at present to change the qualifying period for unfair dismissal. The House of Lords has referred to the European Court of Justice questions relating to whether the qualifying period for unfair dismissal is indirectly discriminatory against women.

One Day Sales

Mr. Pike: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what representations her Department has received about one day sales; what plans she has to introduce regulations to control such sales; and if she will make a statement. [2279]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: My Department has received representations about one day sales from trading standards departments, chambers of commerce, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and LACOTS (the Local Authorities Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards). I know they cause considerable concern and have instituted an urgent review. My officials will shortly be meeting representatives of LACOTS to discuss proposals they have made for tackling the problem.

Anglia Television

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what powers she has to order a fresh investigation into the dealings in Anglia Television shares by Lord Archer. [2994]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: The Secretary of State may appoint inspectors if there are circumstances suggesting that an insider dealing offence may have been committed. As inspectors have already been appointed and reported in this case a fresh investigation would be appropriate only if new information came to light.

Parental Leave

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what estimates she has made of the numbers of people in one year who would be eligible for parental leave from their employer and of the average duration of such leave taken at any one time. [2968]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Research shows that many companies offer some form of parental leave to their employees, but we do not know how many people are covered by such arrangements in any one year or the average length of leave taken.

The Government intends to accept the Social Chapter including the Parental Leave Directive, which entitles employees to a minimum of three months' unpaid parental leave. The precise effects of the directive will depend on how it is implemented and we are not yet able to give estimates of the kind requested.

Beer Measures

Mr. Whitehead: To ask the President of the Board of Trade what plans he has to introduce a standard pint measure mark as a requirement for glasses in which beer is served in public houses; and if he will make a statement. [3293]

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: My Department is discussing this matter with interested parties and I hope to make a statement shortly.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Human Rights

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the extent to which her Department will carry out human rights appraisal, monitoring and evaluation in respect of all aid projects; and what account her Department will take of human rights reports in carrying out such appraisal, monitoring and evaluation. [2277]

Clare Short: My Department's goal is the achievement of human rights for all and we will adopt a human rights based approach to development which may include, political, social and economic rights.

DFID's distinct contribution will be to focus on those rights which are important for the eradication of poverty and the dignity of the disadvantaged and will be related to the circumstances of the country and its people.

Palestine and Sierra Leone

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the current level of United Kingdom aid to *(a)* the Palestine National Authority and *(b)* Sierra Leone. [3057]

Clare Short: UK bilateral assistance to the Palestinian National Authority is expected to total nearly £10 million in the current financial year, in addition to our one-sixth share of the European Union's 50 million ecu (£35 million) programme. Spending on aid to Sierra Leone in the UK financial year 1996–97 was an estimated £10.3 million and £1.4 million to UN organisations. Spending in the current financial year will depend on developments following the military coup on 25 May.

HEALTH

Rural Community Hospitals

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to review the role of rural community hospitals; and if he will make a statement; [2489]

(2) if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government with regard to rural community hospitals; and if he will make a statement. [2488]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) on 2 June, *Official Report*, column *41*.

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the bed-types on which the efficiency of hospitals is assessed, with particular reference to community hospitals; and what plans he has to increase the variety of bed-types used in that assessment; [2486]

(2) if he will list the criteria used by his Department in assessing the efficiency of hospitals, with particular reference to rural community hospitals. [2487]

Mr. Boateng: We measure the efficiency of health authorities, not hospitals, centrally. Activity is at present measured by the number of episodes of care, not the number or type of bed used. Where a health authority commissions inpatient care from a community hospital then this activity will at present be measured in the efficiency index for that authority.

Wythenshawe Hospital

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients resident at Wythenshawe Hospital on 1 June had been forced to remain in hospital for longer than their treatment required because suitable residential or day care support was not available; how many such patients had been resident at the hospital for up to *(a)* one week, *(b)* two weeks, *(c)* one month, *(d)* two months and *(e)* three months or more; and what estimate he has made of the additional financial costs to the NHS of these extended periods of care; [2554]

(2) how many patients admitted to Wythenshawe Hospital in *(a)* 1995–96 and *(b)* 1996–97 had been forced to remain in hospital for longer than their treatment required because suitable residential or day care was not available for up to (i) one week, (ii) two weeks, (iii) one month, (iv) two months and (v) three months or longer; and what estimate he has made of the additional costs to the NHS of these extended periods of care. [2553]

Mr. Boateng: Health and social services are working hard across the country to resolve the difficulties caused by delayed discharges. In Manchester, the National Health Service trusts, health authority and social services are currently working together to understand the reason for delayed discharges and what they can do to resolve the problems this causes in terms of patient care and cost to the NHS. Officials have already been asked urgently to address this issue in terms of revised guidance on hospital discharge.

Patients in the South Manchester area are admitted to both Withington and Wythenshawe Hospitals and many from the Wythenshawe area are transferred to Withington as this is where the trust's rehabilitation and care of the elderly wards are located. The information given relates to both hospitals.

Length of wait (months)	*Wythenshawe*	*Withington*
6–8	—	6
5	5	7
4	3	3
3	4	10
2	4	4
1	3	4
Total number of patients accepted for placement	19	34
Total number of patients waiting for assessment	[1]4	[2]31

[1] total wait = 242 days
[2] total wait = 1,437 days.

There are also 17 patients in the elderly mental health unit at Withington whose discharges are delayed. These people have been in-patients for between one and four months.

Neonatal Injury

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department is taking to eliminate the damage caused by (i) Erb's palsy and (ii) brachial plexus injuries during the birth process; [2885]

(2) if he will list the incidence of *(a)* Erb's palsy and *(b)* brachial plexus injuries over the past 20 years. [2886]

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take to raise national awareness of Erb's palsy. [2878]

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce a programme *(a)* for the recording of every incidence of (i) Erb's palsy and (ii) brachial plexus injuries and *(b)* to raise the general awareness about Erb's palsy. [2930]

Ms Jowell: We are of course concerned about the damage to babies caused by Erb's palsy and brachial plexus injuries during birth. The safety of the mother and her unborn child are of paramount importance and childbirth is safer now than at any other time. Most cases of Erb's palsy and brachial plexus injuries arise spontaneously but are also considered to be influenced by misplacement of the shoulders in the birth canal. In

recognition of this problem, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologist has issued guidelines stating that every maternity unit should have agreed protocols for the management of shoulder malpresentations to minimise the risk of these conditions. We are not aware of any evidence to suggest that obstetric intervention contributes to the incidence.

Information on the number of finished consultant episodes of those patients admitted to hospital with primary diagnosis "Erb's Palsy" and "brachial plexus" injuries in NHS hospitals in England up to 1994–95 is available through HES (Hospital Episode Statistics) data and is shown in the attached table. The definition of a consultant episode is the period that a patient spends under the continuous care of a specific consultant in a specific health care provider. A hospital provider spell can comprise one or more consultant episodes. Hospital Episode Statistics will therefore pick up cases where the diagnosis was not made at birth and the baby was subsequently re-admitted. Information prior to 1989–90 recorded discharges and deaths and is therefore not directly comparable to Hospital Episode Statistics Data.

Primary diagnosis—of Erb's palsy (ICD9 code 767.6) and brachial plexus injuries (ICD9 code 953.4)

Ordinary admissions and day cases combined NHS hospitals, England

Estimated number of Finished Consultant Episodes (FCEs)

	1989–90	*1990–91*	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*
Erb's palsy/Klumpke's palsy	142	158	202	240	370	330
Injury to brachial plexus	337	191	181	149	135	148

Notes:

ICD9 code 767.6: Injury to brachial plexus (birth trauma)—Erb's palsy and Klumpke's palsy combined.

ICD9 code 953.4: Injury to brachial plexus.

Data in this table is grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Source:

Department of Health, Hospital Episode Statistics (HES).

Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department *(a)* has commissioned and *(b)* plans to commission on the health problems facing carers. [2963]

Mr. Boateng: In recent years the Department of Health has funded a substantial body of research on carers and caring which has looked, inter alia, at the health of carers. The completed research has been published and widely disseminated.

Research currently in progress includes a major evaluative research study on community care for very dependent older people, which will investigate outcomes for both users and carers. A developmentally focused programme of research to develop and test new approaches to assessing community care outcomes for users and carers is currently being taken forward in collaboration with two local authorities.

Plans are well in hand to commission a major new research initiative on outcomes of social care for adults, to include outcomes for carers. It is expected that the research will include a study of outcomes of assessments of carers' needs, a study of carer outcomes over time, and a study to evaluate the impact on older people with dementia and their carers of early primary care intervention. A study of carer burdens and associated costs in dementia care over time is also planned.

Breast Implant Registry

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make the existing National Breast Implant Registry compulsory; and if he will make a statement. [3170]

Mr. Boateng: We have no plans at present to make the National Breast Implant Registry compulsory. Any changes to the policy on breast implants must await the report of the Independent Review Group set up recently by the Chief Medical Officer.

Insulin Pen

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make pen system needles for insulin dependent diabetics available on prescription; and if he will make a statement. [3171]

Mr. Milburn: We are currently considering whether general practitioners should be allowed to prescribe insulin injection pen needles on the National Health Service.

PRIME MINISTER

Interception of Communications Act 1985

Mr. Ashton: To ask the Prime Minister when the Annual report of the Commissioner appointed under section 8(1) of the Interception of Communications Act 1985 will be laid before the House; and if he will make a statement. [3812]

The Prime Minister: A copy of Lord Nolan's annual report for 1996 has been laid before the House today in accordance with section 8(7) of the Interception of Communications Act 1985. The confidential annex to the report has been excluded from that copy in accordance with section 8(8) of the 1995 Act. I am grateful to the Commissioner for his work in reviewing the issue of warrants and in providing assistance to the Tribunal as provided for in the Act. I note in particular the Commissioner's view that interception of both postal and telecommunications remains both an effective and an essential operation in the interests of national security and the economic well-being of the United Kingdom, and the prevention and detection of serious crime.

Intelligence Services Act 1994

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Prime Minister when the Annual report of the Commissioner appointed under the Intelligence Services Act 1994 will be laid before the House; and if he will make a statement. [3905]

The Prime Minister: A copy of Lord Justice Stuart-Smith's annual report, for 1996, has been laid before the House today in accordance with section 8(6) of

the Intelligence Services Act 1994. The confidential annex to the report has been excluded from that copy in accordance with section 8(7) of the 1994 Act. I am grateful to the Commissioner for his work in reviewing the issue of warrants and authorisations, and in providing assistance to the Tribunal as provided for in the Act. I note that he was satisfied that the former Secretary of State had properly exercised his powers under the two sections of the 1994 Act.

DEFENCE

Service Personnel (Electoral Registration)

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the proportion and number of Service personnel on the electoral register who do not exercise their vote. [3201]

Mr. Spellar: My Department does not keep records of those Service personnel who exercise their rights to vote. This is a private matter for the individual. However, it is possible to ascertain the percentage of Service personnel who are registered to vote. As at 1 April 1997, 72.5 per cent. of Service personnel were so registered. Comprehensive measures are taken by the Services to ensure that all personnel are given the necessary information to enable them to register as Service voters.

NATO Enlargement

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his Department's policy on the conclusions of the US Department of State report on the Enlargement of NATO, with particular reference to the responsibility for bearing the costs associated with improving NATO's regional reinforcement capabilities. [3180]

Dr. John Reid: The report to Congress by the US Administration on the enlargement of NATO provides a useful assessment of the relevant issues. In the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out the collective defence of both existing and new members and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration and capability for reinforcement. On that basis, we do not expect NATO enlargement of itself to require significant changes to the capabilities already determined collectively by the Alliance as necessary to fulfil this strategy.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the financial cost to Britain of NATO expansion up to the year 2001. [3181]

Dr. Reid: No decisions have been taken on which countries will accede to NATO membership, when, or on what terms. The costs of enlargement, which will fall both on the countries which join and on the existing members of the Alliance and which will be incurred over a long period, will depend on those decisions. Subject to that caveat, we expect the costs of enlargement to be manageable.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals he has to revise NATO's Strategic Concept agreed in 1991. [3182]

Dr. Reid: The Alliance's Strategic Concept, adopted by NATO's Heads of State and Government at their meeting in Rome in 1991, sets out the principal aims and objectives of the Alliance. Recognising the changes in the strategic environment since 1991, the Alliance has decided to examine the Strategic Concept to ensure that it is fully consistent with Europe's new security situation and challenges. NATO Foreign Ministers decided, at their meeting in Sintra on 29 May, to recommend to NATO's Heads of State and Government that they should decide the way ahead at their Summit in Madrid on 8 and 9 July.

Asbestos-related Diseases

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many compensation claims from former service men who suffer from asbestos-related illnesses have been turned down by his Department; [1896]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of former service men suffering from asbestos-related diseases who are not covered by the change in the law in 1987 which gave service personnel the same rights as civilian employees to obtain compensation; [1897]

(3) how many cases of asbestos-related disease in former service personnel have been reported to his Department. [1898]

Dr. John Reid: Unfortunately, we have no means of knowing how many cases of asbestos-related disease in former service personnel have ever been reported to my Department. Nor does my Department hold data which could be used to estimate how many former service personnel may be suffering from such diseases. However, my Department's computer records on claims for compensation show that since 23 October 1986 we have been notified of 100 claims from former service personnel suffering from an asbestos-related illness due to their time in the Armed Forces. All of these claims for compensation had to be repudiated on the basis of Section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947 because they related to exposure before May 1987. The repeal of Section 10 in 1987, which first gave members of the Armed Forces the right to claim common law damages from their employer, was not retrospective.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce a scheme to provide compensation for former service personnel and workers at defence installations who are suffering asbestos-related diseases as a result of exposure to asbestos during their employment. [3036]

Dr. Reid: I have asked for advice on the issue of compensation for former service personnel and civilian workers who are suffering from an asbestos-related disease as a result of exposure to asbestos during their employment with my Department; and I will consider what options to provide assistance may be available.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service (Welsh Language)

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Attorney-General if the Crown Prosecution Service is subject to the requirements of the Welsh Language Act 1993 in the preparation of official reports and other publications. [3167]

The Attorney-General: The provisions of the Welsh Language Act 1993 do not apply to servants or agents of the Crown. They do not, therefore, apply to the Crown Prosecution Service. If a Crown servant or agent chooses voluntarily to adopt a Welsh language scheme, certain provisions of the Act concerning the preparation of a scheme and the investigation of alleged failure to comply with it do apply. The CPS is currently considering the preparation of a detailed formal scheme in accordance with the Welsh Language Board's guidance.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Attorney-General what was the cost of producing the bilingual 1996 annual report of the Mid-Glamorgan CPS. [3169]

The Attorney-General: The production cost of the bilingual Branch annual report for the Crown Prosecution Service Mid-Glamorgan was approximately £1,145.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Attorney-General if CPS branches in Wales have *(a)* sought and *(b)* been given professional advice by the Welsh Language Board about the grammatical accuracy of their official reports and other publications. [3168]

The Attorney-General: The hon. Member may be referring to the report of the Mid-Glamorgan branch of the Crown Prosecution Service. For this report a professional translator was used. Unfortunately on return of final proofs from the printers grammatical errors in the Welsh language version went uncorrected. However steps will be taken in future to seek to avoid any such re-occurrence.

Prosecution Arrangements

Ms Merron: To ask the Attorney-General what progress has been made in establishing the proposed review of the Crown Prosecution Service to which he referred in his written answer to the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears) on 21 May, *Official Report*, columns *73–74*. [3979]

The Attorney-General: I am extremely pleased that Sir Iain Glidewell, a retired Lord Justice of Appeal, has agreed to chair the independent Review of the Crown Prosecution Service. He will be assisted by Sir Geoffrey Dear who retires at the end of this week as HM Inspector of Constabulary and (a person with management and organisational experience). Sir Iain proposes to commence work on Monday 16 June 1997. The Review will examine closely the internal structures of the Crown Prosecution Service, together with its policies and procedures. It will also consider ways to enable the Crown Prosecution Service to inform victims of crime about prosecutions decisions. The Review will have the following terms of reference:

Against the background of the decision that the CPS should in future be divided so that there are Chief Crown Prosecutors in all police force areas but within a national framework, to:

> examine the organisation and structure of the CPS, including the role of Headquarters, together with CPS policies and procedures and to consider whether and, if so, what changes are necessary in order to provide for the more effective and efficient prosecution of crime through local public prosecutors;

Without prejudice to the generalities of the above for that purpose, to:

- assess whether the CPS has contributed to the falling number of convictions for recorded crime;
- consider the manner in which the CPS influences its relationship with the police;
- consider the validity of criticisms that the CPS has led to unjustified "downgradings" of charges; and
- make and cost recommendations taking account of the need to operate within existing provision.

Sir Iain will aim to submit his report to me by the end of 1997. He will be seeking views and contributions from a wide range of sources including the Crown Prosecution Service and its staff as well as other criminal justice agencies and legal practitioners. The Report will be published.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the NFU on the decline in the price of beef in the UK market. [3038]

Mr. Rooker: The matter of beef prices was most recently discussed when our right hon. Friend, the Minister, met the NFU on 3 June.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are his Department's forecasts of the amount of beef that it is expected will be held in intervention in each of the next four years. [3039]

Mr. Rooker: The extent to which UK beef will be purchased into intervention over the next four years will depend upon the state of the EU and UK beef markets and the rules governing access to intervention. The Department has not attempted to make forecasts over such a long timescale in this difficult area.

Organophosphates

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the environmental hazards associated with organophosphates. [2827]

Mr. Rooker: *(a)* The Ministry has commissioned no research into the environmental hazards associated with organophosphates (OPs).

(b) No veterinary medicine is authorised for use unless it meets stringent statutory criteria of safety, quality and efficacy. Safety includes safety to the environment. Applications for marketing authorisations must be supported by data which are assessed against the statutory criteria, including details of research.

Organophosphates are also used as agricultural pesticides. The marketing or use of a pesticide is approved only after thorough evaluation. No approval is given to pesticides that pose any unacceptable risk to human beings, non-target species or the wider environment.

Farmers (Forms)

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to simplify and rationalise the forms that farmers are obliged to complete. [3074]

Mr. Rooker: An Efficiency Scrutiny on Simplifying Farmers' Paperwork was conducted last year by my and the Welsh Office Agriculture Departments, with the assistance of working farmers. These recommendations are being implemented subject to compatibility with legislation and further views of the industry.

Abattoirs

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of approved abattoirs operating within England for each year from 1975 to date. [1572]

Mr. Rooker: At 1 June 1997 there were 381 licensed red meat slaughterhouses in England. The table below gives figures for each year from 1975 to 1996. Prior to 1993 red meat slaughterhouses in England were licensed not by MAFF but by local authorities. The figures for 1975 to 1992 have therefore been derived from records of State Veterinary Service visits during each year and are approximate.

Year	*Numbers*
1975	1,385
1976	1,320
1977	1,280
1978	1,145
1979	975
1980	960
1981	910
1982	840
1983	875
1984	860
1985	850
1986	815
1987	795
1988	780
1989	690
1990	645
1991	595
1992	[1]540
1993[2]	434
1994[2]	424
1995[2]	402
1996[2]	384

[1] At the end of 1992, 455 applications had been made to MAFF for licences under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1992.

[2] As at 31 December.

Live Animal Transport

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to minimise journey times for animals between point of production and place of slaughter; and if he will make a statement. [1573]

Mr. Morley: The rules on journey times for live farm animals are laid down by EU Directive 91/628, as amended in 1995. We shall be seeking improvements, especially in relation to slaughter animals, when these rules come up for review in 1999. In the meantime we have made the new Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 to bring about overdue implementation of the 1995 EU rules and to enable controls on the welfare of animals in transit to be tightened. We will not compromise on these rules.

Meat Hygiene Service

Mr. Baker: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to return the functions currently exercised by the Meat Hygiene Service to local authority control; and if he will make a statement. [1574]

Mr. Rooker: The Government has published for consultation Professor James's report into the establishment of an independent Food Standards Agency and will look carefully at the options for the future of the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) following the consultation exercise. Professor James himself states in his report that the arguments for dismantling the MHS and redistributing its responsibilities to Local Authorities are unconvincing, and that the new Agency should take over responsibility for the MHS.

Animal Health (Prosecutions)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports his Department obtains regarding prosecutions by local authorities for offences under the Bovine Animals (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1995; and if he will make a statement. [2805]

Mr. Rooker: The Department obtains quarterly reports from local authorities regarding prosecutions under the Animal Health Act 1981 for offences under the Bovine Animals (Records, Identification and Movement) Order 1995.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports his Department obtains regarding prosecutions by local authorities for offences under the Heads of Sheep and Goats Order 1996; and if he will make a statement. [2806]

Mr. Rooker: The Heads of Sheep and Goats Order is made under the Animal Health Act 1981. Local authorities are required to inform the Ministry of any prosecutions taken in 1996, including by local authorities, are contained in the "Return of Expenditure Incurred and

Prosecutions taken under the Animal Health Act 1981, and Incidence of Disease in Imported Animals for the Year 1996" made to Parliament under Section 80 of the Act. That shows no prosecutions taken in 1996 under this Order and we are aware of none so far this year.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports his Department obtains regarding prosecutions by local authorities for offences under the SBM Order; and if he will make a statement. [2810]

Mr. Rooker: The SBM Order is made under the Animal Health Act 1981. Local authorities are required to inform the Ministry of any prosecutions taken under Orders made under the Act. Details of prosecutions taken in 1996, including by local authorities, are contained in the "Return of Expenditure Incurred and Prosecutions taken under the Animal Health Act 1981, and Incidences of Disease in Imported Animals for the Year 1996" made to Parliament under Section 80 of the Act. They are also reported in the monthly BSE Enforcement Bulletin, copies of which are available in the Library of the House, and the latest of which was sent by me to every Right hon. and hon. Member last week.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports his Department obtains regarding prosecutions by local authorities for offences under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995; and if he will make a statement. [2811]

Mr. Rooker: Local authorities have no enforcement responsibilities under the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995. These Regulations are enforced by the Meat Hygiene Service, an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, created in 1995. Details of any prosecutions under these Regulations will be reported in the monthly Meat Hygiene Enforcement Report which was first published at the end of May 1997, copies of which are available in the Library of the House. A copy was also sent by me to all hon. Members last week.

Mr. Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports his Department obtains regarding prosecutions by local authorities for offences under the Fresh Meat (Beef Control) Regulations 1996; and if he will make a statement. [2812]

Mr. Rooker: There is no statutory requirement for local authorities to notify my Department of prosecutions they make under the Fresh Meat (Beef Controls) Regulations 1996. However, the Ministry obtains as much information as possible on such prosecutions by other means, including the BSE Regulatory Forum which is attended by local authority representatives to co-ordinate enforcement activity, and from day to day contacts between local authorities and Ministry staff around the country. Details are reported in the monthly BSE Enforcement Bulletin, copies of which are available in the Library of the House, the latest of which was sent to all hon. Members last week.

Over 30 Months Scheme

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports his Department obtains regarding prosecutions by local authorities for offences under the Over 30 Months Slaughter Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [2807]

Mr. Rooker: The Over 30 Months Scheme (OTMS) provides for compensation payments to producers for animals which can no longer be taken into the food or feed chain. There are no specific offences under the scheme for which local authorities have prosecuting responsibility although the movement of animals and the handling and processing of material arising from the scheme is governed by a range of more widely applicable legislation in which local authorities may have an enforcement role. No prosecutions have been brought by this Department for offences specific to the scheme and no central records are maintained from which local authority prosecutions under other legislation but relating to OTMS material could be extracted.

Beef Stocks Transfer Scheme

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports his Department obtains regarding prosecutions by local authorities for offences under the Beef Stocks Transfer Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [2808]

Mr. Rooker: The Beef Stocks Transfer Scheme is a non-statutory scheme administered by the Intervention Board and enforceable on claimants by contract. The Scheme contains no offence provisions. Activities of companies engaged by the Board in connection with its administration responsibilities are covered by normal criminal law. To date we have had no reports of any prosecutions.

Calf Processing Aid Scheme

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports his Department obtains regarding prosecutions by local authorities for offences under the Calf Processing Aid Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [2809]

Mr. Rooker: The Calf Processing Aid Scheme provides for payments to be made to slaughterers of eligible calves. There are no specific offences under the scheme for which local authorities have prosecuting responsibility although the movement of animals and the handling and processing of material arising from the scheme is governed by a range of more widely applicable legislation in which local authorities may have an enforcement role. No prosecutions have been brought by this Department for offences specific to the scheme and no central records are maintained from which local authority prosecutions under other legislation but relating to the scheme animals or material could be extracted.

BSE

Mrs. Helen Jackson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the locations and number per location of BSE diagnosed cattle landfill in Britain. [612]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 21 May 1997]:* The Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC), which advises Ministers on BSE, considered the issue of BSE and the environment in May last year, including the past disposal of the carcases of cattle affected, or suspected of being affected, with BSE to landfill sites. It considered that although the spongiform encephalopathy agent was not yet fully characterised, there was good evidence to believe that individual molecules were not infectious and that infectivity was associated with macro molecular agglomerations indeed possibly with tissue fragments, albeit small ones. On this basis it concluded

"it was unlikely that leachate from landfill sites would present a significant risk and there was certainly no justification for taking heroic measures to excavate sites, even those which had previously been used for material such as BSE-confirmed cattle".

The Environment Agencies took over responsibility for the safe regulation of landfill sites in April 1996, and under Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 they monitor ground and surface water quality in the vicinity of licensed landfill sites to check for leachate contamination. The Agencies have carried out a qualitative assessment of all the sites concerned taking into account the number of carcases buried, the degree of containment and the proximity of water sources. They have also carried out a further more detailed quantitative assessment of a selection of sites which were judged from the qualitative assessment to be typical of those sites that appeared to be most vulnerable. The results show that potential risks to be very low, less than one in a million years.

The conclusions of the assessment are in line with the advice previously given to Ministers by SEAC. The Committee has been given the opportunity to comment on the quantitative assessment and has given it its endorsement. The Environment Agencies are now considering how best to publish the report, and related work, and aim to do so shortly.

A list of the locations of the sites concerned and numbers per location is below. No BSE suspects have been disposed of by landfilling since 1991, when sufficient carcase incineration capacity came on stream to process the number of cases that were coming forward:

Number of BSE suspects carcases disposed of	*Site*	*County*	*Comment*
1001–1200	Everleigh Tip, Everleigh, Pewsey	Wiltshire	Closed
501–1000	Stoney Hill Landfill, Horsehay, Telford	Shropshire	Closed
401–500	Hill and Moor Landfill Site, Pershore	Hereford and Worcester	
201–400	Wardle Landfill Site, Wardle, Nr. Nantwich	Cheshire	Closed
	Arpley Landfill Site, Arpley, Warrington	Cheshire	
	Whites Pit, Arrowsmith Rd, Poole Attlebridge	Dorset	Closed
	Landfill Site, Attlebridge	Norfolk	
	Welford Quarry Landfill Site, Welford Himley	Northants	
	Wood Landfill Site, Lwr Gornal	Staffs	
101–200	Jameson Rd Landfill Site, Fleetwood	Lancs	
	Salt Ayre Landfill Site, Lancaster	Lancs	
	Winterton Landfill Site, West Haulton, Scunthorpe	Lincs	
	Rock Cottage Landfill, Ripon	North Yorkshire	Closed
	Gamblethorpe Landfill Site, Newsam Green Rd, Leeds	South Yorkshire	Closed
51–100	Taddington Landfill Site, Kalton Hill Quarry, Taddington		
	Crich Landfill Site, Crich, Nr Matlock		
	Gainsborough, Lea Rd, Gainsborough		
	Packington Landfill, Little Packington, Meriden		
21–50	Butchersfield Landfill Site, Rixton, Warrington	Cheshire	
	Blooming Heather, Broughton Moor	Cumbria	Closed
	Clifton Marsh, Freckleton	Lancashire	
	Rowley Landfill Site, Queen Park Road, Burnley	Lancashire	
	Bramford Landfill Site, Ipswich	Suffolk	Closed
	Lackford Hall Heath, Lackford, Bury St. Edmunds	Suffolk	
	Ryton Landfill, Ryton-on-Dunsmore	Warwickshire	Closed
	Darrington Quarry, Darrington Leys, Knottingly	North Yorkshire	
	Mickleby Landfill, Near Whitby	North Yorkshire	
11–20	Stretton Sugwas, Worcester	Hereford and Worcester	Closed
	Whinney Hill, Accrington	Lancashire	
	South Thoresby, Near Alford	Lincolnshire	Closed
	Kirby-on-Bain, Tattershall Road, Kirkby-on-Bain	Lincolnshire	
	Leadenham Quarry, Portergate Road, Leadenham	Lincolnshire	
	Ingham, Thetford Road, Ingham, Bury St.Edmunds	Suffolk	Closed

Number of BSE suspects carcases disposed of	Site	County	Comment
11–20 *cont.*	Seamer Carr Landfill Site, Seamer	North Yorkshire	
6–10	Pluckley Landfill Site, Pluckley, Ashford	Kent	Closed
	Kenwick Landfill Site, Kennick Quarry, Louth	Lincolnshire	
	Seghill, Northumberland	Northumbria	
	Barnstone Landfill Site, Works Lane, Lanham	Nottinghamshire	
	Jeniva Landfill Site Hawton, Newark	Nottingham-shire	Closed
	Dimmer Landfill Site, Castle Cary	Somerset	Closed
	Wetherden Landfill Site, Stowmarket	Suffolk	
	Beddingham Landfill Site, Lewes	East Sussex	
1–5	Nantycaws Refuse Tip	Carmarthenshire	
	Stoneyfield, Invergordon	Highland	Closed
	Middleton, Forss, Thurso	Highland	Closed
	Castletown Tip, Castletown, Thurso	Highland	Closed
	Holiday Moss, Rainford, Merseyside	Lancashire	
	Morley Greaseworks Site, Dewsbury Road	Leeds	Closed
	Nettleton, Woods Hill, Nettleton	Lincolnshire	Closed
	Stainby, Crabtree Road, Stainby, Grantham	Lincolnshire	
	Boston, Slippery Gowt, Wyberton, Boston	Lincolnshire	
	North Forr, Crieff	Perthshire	Closed
	Bryn Posteg Landfill Site, Llannidloes	Powys	
	Acton Landfill Site, Bears Pit, Sudbury	Suffolk	Closed
	Burton Farm Landfill Site, Bishopton, Stratford-on-Avon	Warwickshire	Closed
	Lower Spen Valley, Dewsbury	West Yorkshire	
	Sugden End Landfill, Crossroads, Keighley	West Yorkshire	
	Shroggs Landfill Site, Wheatley, Halifax	West Yorkshire	Closed
	Wilson Road Landfill Site, Lowmoor, Bradford	West Yorkshire	Closed

Bio-aerosol Production

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the hazards of bio-aerosol production in and around commercial compost-making facilities. [2826]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

My Department has commissioned and evaluated two research projects on composting which, amongst other things, considered bio-aerosol production: *Composting of Waste Derived Fines Rejects at Castle Bromwich* (CWM/081/93) and *Municipal Waste Composting* (CWM/074/93). The bio-aerosol results within the latter report were published separately as *Airborne Micro-organisms Associated with Domestic Waste Composting* (WSL-LR 808(MR)). These reports are available from the Waste Management Information Bureau, AEA Technology plc, F6 Culham, Oxfordshire OX14 3DB, telephone number 01235 463162.

Research funded by the Health and Safety Executive, which is sponsored by my Department, has also addressed bio-aerosol product from composting plants. The results were incorporated in two publications: "Domestic waste composting plants as sources of airborne micro-organisms", by B. Crook, R. P. Bardos and J. Lacey in *Aerosols, their Generation, Behaviour and Applications,* Proceedings Second Aerosol Society Conference, London: The Aerosol Society, 1988; and "Microbial emissions from composts made for mushroom production and from domestic waste" by J. Lacey, P. A. M. Williamson and B. Crook in *Composting and Compost Quality Assurance* Criteria, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Community, EUR14254, 1992.

In addition, research being carried out for the Environment Agency, which is funded by my Department, has been monitoring bio-aerosol production at three commercial composting sites, although the results have not yet been published.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Housing Benefit

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the Government's policy regarding restrictions on housing benefit for single claimants aged between 25 and 60 years. [2234]

Mr. Bradley: Measures to restrict housing benefit for single people under the age of 60 were inherited from the previous administration and the reduction in expenditure this entails form part of Departmental expenditure plans. We are reviewing those plans and will announce our decision shortly.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research has been commissioned, what estimates have been made by her Department and what information presented to her, regarding the costs per annum to the social security budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if she will make a statement. [2106]

Mr. Field: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend, the President of the Board of Trade on 9 June, *Official Report,* column *310.*

Pension Scheme Surpluses

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for legislation to prevent banks appropriating pension scheme surpluses in their annual accounts. [2090]

Mr. Denham: Any payment to employers of surplus pension fund assets can be made only where the following requirements are:-

the Inland Revenue approve the payment, which must satisfy paragraph 6(1) of Schedule 22 to the Taxes Act 1988.

the trustees must be satisfied that the payment is in the interests of the members.

where it is necessary for the employer's consent to be given, that consent shall be obtained.

all current and future pensions in payment, including those accrued in the past must be increased annually in line with the Retail Prices Index or 5 per cent. whichever is the less.

members have been properly notified of the proposal.

Members have the right to make written representations to the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (OPRA) against the trustees' proposal if they believe the statutory criteria have not been followed. OPRA will then decide whether the scheme has met the statutory conditions.

Failure to comply with the legislation lays the trustees open to sanction by OPRA, which can also order the employer to make restitution.

We have no plans to change these rules at present. We are currently evaluating the Pensions Act to see how it is working in practice.

Fuel (Direct Deductions Scheme)

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans she has for the direct deductions scheme for fuel. [2287]

Mr. Bradley: The Government is committed to creating a modern and efficient Social Security system. To this end and we are currently considering the direct payments scheme, including the report published in February following the review carried out under the previous administration. We will be making an announcement in due course.

Compensation Recovery Scheme

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if she will make a statement on the applicability of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997 to settlements on and after 1 October 1997. [2846]

Mr. Bradley: It is intended that the provisions of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997 will apply to all compensation payments made on or after Monday 6 October 1997 unless they are made in pursuance of a court order or agreement made before that day.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Somalia

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many DNA tests have been carried out by the British Embassy in Somalia on Somali nationals applying for family reunion in the past five years; and how many of those tests have shown that relatives were not related as claimed. [2978]

Mr. Fatchett: The UK does not have any diplomatic representation in Somalia. Somalia applicants for family reunion apply at the British Embassy at Addis Ababa. We have figures only for Somalia family reunion applicants who have been DNA tested at Addis Ababa from 1994 onwards. They are as follows:

Year	*Number tested*	*Not related as claimed*
1994	44	14
1995	37	13
1996	64	17
1997[1]	42	1

[1] So far.

Immigration

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the average cost of processing a settlement application. [2866]

Mr. Fatchett: The average cost of processing a settlement application is £240.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for entry clearance have been refused under the primary purpose rule in each of the past five years. [2869]

Mr. Fatchett: The number of applications for entry clearance wholly or partly refused under the primary purpose rule at Posts in the Indian sub-continent is as follows:

1992: 2,580

1993: 2,390

1994: 2,370

1995: 2,440

Definite figures for 1996 are not yet available. Figures for other posts are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Sudan

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with Sudan. [3071]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have close historic links with Sudan. But we are concerned about the Government of Sudan's record in a number of areas, notably human rights and its prosecution of the civil war in the country. We look to the Government of Sudan to respond positively to the human rights concern most recently expressed by the international community at the UN Commission on Human Rights in April of this year. We continue to stress the need for a comprehensive negotiated settlement to the civil war.

Libya

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from President Nelson Mandela regarding *(a)* sanctions against Libya and *(b)* Lockerbie. [3066]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have received no such representations.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to review sanctions policy regarding Libya; and what assessment he has made of the resolution passed at the Organisation of African Unity summit relating to sanctions against Libya. [3067]

Mr. Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on 10 June, *Official Report*, column *400*.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning events in Sierra Leone. [3068]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The military coup of 25 May which overthrew Sierra Leone's democratically elected government has not yet been overturned. The coup leaders have been joined by the Revolutionary United Front guerillas who have waged a long war against the Sierra Leone government. It is unclear who, if anyone, is now governing Sierra Leone. There have been no reports of fighting in Freetown since 3 June though sporadic looting continues. Food and fuel are in short supply. We have deplored the coup. We are in touch with regional powers involved in efforts to find a peaceful negotiated settlement in Sierra Leone. We shall continue to work for the return of constitutional order to Sierra Leone without further bloodshed.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has held with his counterparts in Commonwealth countries regarding Sierra Leonean participation in Commonwealth meetings and bodies. [3069]

Mr. Lloyd: I look forward to discussing Sierra Leone with others in the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) when it meets in London on 10–11 July 1997. CMAG was created at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Auckland in 1995 and has since its inception considered events in Sierra Leone. It will report to this year's CHOGM in Edinburgh in October. Officials are in close contract with the Commonwealth Secretariat on events in Sierra Leone.

Burma

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from ASEAN member states regarding Burmese participation in the Asia-Europe summit meeting. [3070]

Mr. Tony Lloyd: We have had no approaches from ASEAN members making representations over Burmese participation in the Asia-Europe summit meeting.

EU (Freedom, Security and Justice)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the subject areas where the Dutch presidency have proposed replacing unanimity with qualified majority voting in Freedom, Security and Justice (SN 539/97 c 40); and the numbers of the articles and paragraphs in which these proposals are made. [1973]

Mr. Doug Henderson: The Treaty draft on an "area of freedom, security and justice" proposes a period of 3 years following the entry into force of the Treaty, during which unanimity should continue to apply to all subject areas currently covered by unanimity. On the expiry of this period, qualified majority voting would be extended to the following areas currently covered by unanimity:

Subject	*Article*	*Paragraph*
Internal borders	B	1
External borders	B	2a
Issuing of short term visas	B	2b (ii) and (iv)
Freedom of travel within the EU for third country nationals	B	3
Asylum policy and procedures	C	1
Temporary protection for displaced persons	C	2a
Illegal immigration and illegal residence	C	3b
Judicial co-operation in civil matters having cross-border implications	E	—
Administrative co-operation in areas covered by new Title	F	—

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the subject areas to which the Dutch presidency have proposed extending the co-decision procedure in Freedom, Security and Justice (SN 539/97 c 40); and the numbers of the articles and paragraphs in which these proposals are made. [1974]

Mr. Henderson: The draft Treaty text on an "area of freedom, security and justice" proposes a period of 3 years following the entry into force of the Treaty, during which consultation with the European Parliament, rather than co-decision, should continue to apply. The presidency continues to leave open the question of whether, on the expiry of this period, co-decision should apply to certain provisions of the Title.

NATIONAL HERITAGE

Contact Sports

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to ban those identified as bearing the ε4 gene from participating professionally in contact sports; and if he will make a statement. [2119]

Mr. Banks: None. I am aware of the concern about the APO ε4 allele, which is sometimes associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease. I am not aware of evidence which could justify banning those who have the APO ε4 allele from participating professionally in contact sports, even were there powers to do so.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what plans he has to introduce mandatory genetic screening for those involved in contact sports to identify fighters genetically predisposed to suffer brain damage; and if he will make a statement. [2118]

Mr. Banks: None, although this is a very interesting question. However, I believe that the utmost attention must be paid to all sports where risk is a factor, and my Department encourages all governing bodies of sport to have the appropriate medical and safety regulations in place.

National Lottery

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what proportion of income to the national lottery is generated in the Northern region. [2146]

Mr. Banks: Figures on the proportion of income to the national lottery by region are not held by my Department and are an operational matter for Camelot Group plc. I have therefore asked the Director-General of the national lottery, who is responsible for regulating the operation of the lottery, to write to my hon. Friend, placing copies of his response in the Libraries of the House.

Football (Racism)

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage when he next plans to meet representatives of the Football Association to discuss racism in amateur football; and if he will make a statement. [2091]

Mr. Banks: I intend to meet the Football Association again in the near future to discuss many issues of importance to the game, including racism in football. This Government are determined to stamp out racism at all levels of the game.

Departmental Documents

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for National Heritage what percentage and how many documents in 1996 he estimates were *(a)* passed on to the Public Record Office intact, *(b)* passed on to the Public Record Office in censored form, *(c)* retained by his Department in full, *(d)* retained by his Department in part, *(e)* destroyed, *(f)* otherwise disposed of, and *(g)* otherwise unaccounted for. [2512]

Mr. Tom Clarke *[holding answer 11 June 1997]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on 11 June 1997, *Official Report*, columns *450–51*.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Parental Responsibility Orders

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many parental responsibility orders have been made; and how many parental responsibility agreements have been registered each year in England and Wales since the implementation of the Children Act 1989. [2155]

Mr. Hoon: The question concerns a matter which has been assigned to the Court Service under the terms of its framework document. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Michael Huebner to Mr. David Kidney, dated 12 June 1997:

The Parliamentary Secretary of the Lord Chancellor's Department has asked me to reply to your Question about the number of parental responsibility orders made and parental responsibility agreements registered each year in England and Wales since the implementation of the Children Act 1989.

The Children Act 1989 came into force in October 1991. The information you requested has therefore been collected since then and is as follows:

	Parental responsibility orders made	*Parental responsibility agreements registered*
1991 (October to December)	175	263
1992	2,492	2,951
1993	3,377	4,422
1994	3,893	5,506
1995	4,483	3,594
1996	5,687	3,586

(These figures are for county court, High Court and Family proceeding court private law Children Act cases).

Monmouth and Chepstow Magistrates Courts

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about the proposed closure of *(a)* Monmouth and *(b)* Chepstow Magistrates courts. [2380]

Mr. Hoon: Magistrates courts are provided by the local paying authority for the use of the magistrates courts committee (MCC). Decisions concerning the future of any magistrates court are for the relevant MCC to determine.

The Lord Chancellor is involved in a dispute over a magistrates court only when there is an appeal by a contributing local authority against a proposed closure. The procedure for such appeals to set out in section 56 of the Justices of the Peace Act 1979. In the absence of an appeal the Lord Chancellor has no locus in the matter.

Decisions relating to *(a)* Monmouth and *(b)* Chepstow Magistrates Courts remain an issue for local management.

Court Injunctions

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the increase in the use by United Kingdom companies of court injunctions as a means of preventing criticism; what guidance he has given the courts on the use of injunctions in such a way; and if he will place a copy of such guidance in the Library. [2790]

Mr. Hoon: It is for the court in each case to determine whether an injunction would be the appropriate remedy.

Personal Injury Claims

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to use his powers under section 1 of the Damages Act 1996 to set a rate of return for use in personal injury claims. [2556]

Mr. Hoon: It is important that this power is used in a way which supports the interests of all parties. The Lord Chancellor will take note of the outcome of

Wells *v.* Wells, Thomas *v.* Brighton Health Authority and Page *v.* Sheerness Steel, which have been granted leave of appeal in the House of Lords. He will consult interested parties before exercising the power.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to bring into force section 10 of the Civil Evidence Act 1995. [2555]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor will bring into force section 10 of the Civil Evidence Act following the outcome of Wells *v.* Wells, Thomas *v.* Brighton Health Authority and Page *v.* Sheerness Steel, which have been granted leave of appeal in the House of Lords, and consultation with interested parties on the use of particular discount rates for calculating awards in personal injury claims.

Civil Justice Review (Press Conference)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reasons the Lord Chancellor briefed selected journalists on 6 June about the terms of his review of civil justice and legal aid reforms. [3294]

Mr. Hoon: As the review of civil justice and legal aid was the first major announcement made by the Lord Chancellor since his appointment, the Lord Chancellor decided that it was an appropriate opportunity for him to explain the terms of the review to the legal correspondents in person, and to answer their questions.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department who selected the journalists who were invited to the press conference which the Lord Chancellor held on 6 June about the terms of his review of civil justice and legal aid reforms. [3292]

Mr. Hoon: The Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the journalists who were invited to the press conference which the Lord Chancellor held on 6 June about the terms of his review of civil justice and legal aid reforms. [3290]

Mr. Hoon: The following journalists were invited to the Lord Chancellor's briefing on 6 June: Frances Gibb of *The Times*, Clare Dyer of the *Guardian*, Terry Shaw of the *Daily Telegraph*, Patricia Wynn-Davies of the *Independent*, Robert Rice of the *Financial Times*, Joshua Rozenberg of BBC Television News, Jane Peel of BBC Radio News and Marcel Berlins of BBC Radio 4's "Law in Action" programme.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the journalists who attended the press conference which the Lord Chancellor held on 6 June about the terms of his review of civil justice and legal aid reforms. [3291]

Mr. Hoon: The journalists who attended the Lord Chancellor's press briefing were Frances Gibb of *The Times*, Clare Dyer of the *Guardian*, Terry Shaw of the *Daily Telegraph*, Patricia Wynn-Davies of the *Independent*, Robert Rice of the *Financial Times*, Joshua Rozenberg of BBC Television News, Jane Peel of BBC Radio News, and Marcel Berlins of BBC Radio 4's "Law in Action" programme.

Radioactive Waste Disposal (Document)

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 June, *Official Report* column *11*, if he will place in the Library *(a)* a list of the titles of the 42 files on disposal of radioactive waste at the Hurd Deep and *(b)* a copy of the untitled document to which he makes exceptional reference. [2643]

Mr. Hoon: I am placing in the Library a list of the titles and dates of the 42 files referred to.

In drawing up the list it has become clear that there are three further files, beyond the one referred to in my Answer of 2 June (WA 11) that are not open to inspection because they are not yet 30 years old, and I apologise to the hon. Member for inadvertently misleading him on this point. The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority has already applied to the Lord Chancellor for all four items to be opened immediately, and they will be available in the Public Record Office after an Instrument under section 5(1) of the Public Records Act 1958 has been signed.

The Public Record Office has no power under that Act to make closed records, or copies of them, generally available before an Instrument opening the records has been signed.

List of records transferred to the public record office by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority relating to the disposal of radioactive waste at the Hurd Deep

AB 6: United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and predecessors: Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell. Correspondence and papers

Piece number	*Date*	*Title*
153	1946–1952	Radioactive Waste Disposal: General Policy
164	1946–1947	Effluent
237	1946–1948	Effluent Working Party: General Correspondence
381	1947–1954	Radioactive Waste Disposal at Sea
437	1948–1953	Disposal of Radioactivity at Sea
604	1949–1955	Arrangements for Radioactive Waste Disposal at Sea
607	1949–1950	Effluent Disposal
741	1950–1953	Disposal of Radioactive Waste other than at Sea
1045	1952–1958	Disposal of Radioactivity at Sea
1499	1954–1959	Disposal of Radioactive Effluent
1732	1955–1959	Radioactive Waste Effluent:General
1733	1955–1959	Radioactive Waste Disposal:General
1734	1955–1957	Radioactive Waste Disposal:Disposal at Sea
2087	1958–1962	Disposal of Radioactive Waste at Sea
2247	1960–1961	Annual Sea Disposal: 1960–1961
2248	1959	Annual Sea Dumping: 1959
2249	1958	Annual Sea Dumping: 1958
2250	1959	Annual Sea Dumping: 1959
2251	1961	Annual Sea Dumping: 1961
2452	1960–1968	Radioactive Effluent: Correspondence
2575	1961–1962	Annual Sea Disposal Operation

AB 12: United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and Predecessors: Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell: Committees, correspondence and papers

Piece number	Date	Title
43	1947–1948	Effluent Disposal Working Party: Agenda and Minutes
207	1954–1956	Project Health Committee: Agenda, Minutes and Papers
227	1955	Effluent Sub-committee: Minutes
354	1957	High Temperature Gas Cooled Reactor: Clean-up committee: Minutes and Papers
507	1961–1966	Health Committee: Agenda, Minutes and Papers Volume 2

AB 15: United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority and Predecessors: Atomic Energy Research Establishment, Harwell: Reports and memoranda

Piece number	Date	Title
6565	1963	Prediction and Measurement of Doses during Sea Disposal Operations in 1961
6723	1964	Report of the Working Party on Containers for the Disposal of Radioactive Waste at Sea

AB 16: Ministry of Supply and United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority: Atomic Energy Division and London office: Files

Piece number	Date	Title
1653	1955–1958	Disposal of Radioactive Waste by Sea Dumping
1654	1959–1963	Disposal of Radioactive Waste by Sea Dumping
3532	1960–1966	Sea Dumping: Indemnity to and Charges by Admiralty

AB 45: London office: Health and safety: Correspondence and papers

Piece number	Date	Title
39	1963–1964	Disposal of Radioactive Waste by Sea Dumping

AB 54: United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority: Energy Research Establishment Harwell: Health and safety, correspondence and papers

Piece number	Date	Title
2	1962–1963	Annual Sea Disposal Operation
3	1962–1964	Annual Sea Disposal Operation
15	1962–1964	Waste Disposal at Sea
16	1960–1962	Liaison with France: Waste Disposal at Sea
17	1962–1969	Liaison with France: Waste Disposal at Sea
26	1964–1969	European Nuclear Energy Agency: Collaboration on Sea Dumping of Radioactive Waste

AB 54: United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority: Energy Research Establishment Harwell: Health and safety, correspondence and papers

Piece number	Date	Title
27	1962–1965	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: Conditions for Authorisation of Disposal of Radioactive Waste at Sea, and Contracts with Commercial Firms
28	1963–1964	Annual Sea Disposal Operation
29	1964–1973	Sea Dumping: Background Papers
31	1963–1964	Sea Dumping of Radioactive Wastes

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Education Expenditure

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of GDP was spent on education in *(a)* 1979–80, *(b)* 1983–84, *(c)* 1987–88 and *(d)* 1992–93; what is planned to be spent in 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [3035]

Mr. Byers: The information requested is as follows:

	Percentage of GDP spent on education (UK)
1979–80	5.1
1983–84	5.2
1987–88	4.8
1992–93	5.2

Projected expenditure on education in 1997–98 will amount to some £38 billion but accurate figures cannot be calculated until outturn information is available. In 1996–97 the proportion spent on education is estimated to be 4.9 per cent.

Mr. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of his improvement targets on the percentage of GDP to be spent on education over the planning period; and if he will make a statement. [3032]

Mr. Byers: The Government are committed over the course of the Parliament to raising the proportion of national income spent on education as it decreases the proportion spent on the costs of economic and social failure.

Unemployment

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) on 3 June, *Official Report* column *151*, if he will make a statement on the number of 18 to 24-year-olds registered as unemployed, and the estimate of the number of 18 to 24-year-olds by the ILO Labour Force Survey; and what action he proposes in respect of these statistics. [3076]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The latest LFS figures are for Winter 1996–97 and show the number of ILO unemployed 18 to 24-year-olds in the UK to be 498,500. The most comparable claimant count figures are for January 1997, and stood at 479,000. The Government's

commitment, in its New Deal programme, is to give opportunities for work, education or training to 250,000 18 to 24-year-olds who have been unemployed for more than six months. The New Deal is also part of a wider programme aimed at helping people on welfare—including those on other benefits as well as the claimant unemployed—back into work.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

European Legislation

Mr. Lidington: To ask the President of the Council if she will list the items of EC legislation and other relevant documents which *(a)* were scrutinised by the Select Committee on European Legislation in the last Parliament and recommended for further debate but have not yet been considered either by European Standing Committee A or B or on the Floor of the House and *(b)* have not yet been scrutinised by the Select Committee on European Legislation; and if she will make a statement. [3179]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Listed are the five items recommended for debate by the Select Committee on European Legislation in the last Parliament for which the debate is still outstanding.

Committee/floor	*Document reference*	*Subject*
European Standing Committee A (with a Floor debate recommendation)	6177/94	Proposal for a Council Directive concerning the quality of bathing water
European Standing Committee A	5947/94	Proposal for a Council Directive amending Directive 79/489/EEC on the conservation of wild birds
European Standing Committee B	6748/91 and 6294/92	Proposal for a Council Directive on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states on advertising of tobacco products
European Standing Committee B	9098/94	Proposal for a Council Directive on harmonisation of the main provisions concerning export credit insurance for transactions with medium and long-term cover
European Standing Committee B	9141/94	Proposal for a Council Directive on the safeguarding of employees' rights in the event of a transfer

A total of 180 items of business, including some outstanding since the last Parliament, remain to be considered by the Select Committee on European Legislation. I have asked the Clerk of the Committee to send the hon. Member details of remaining business before the Committee and place a copy in the Library of the House. I hope that both the Select Committee on European Legislation and the European Standing Committees will be re-nominated soon.

Defibrillators

Dr. Harris: To ask the President of the Council how many defibrillators are available in the Palace of Westminster; and if she will list their locations, indicating which are *(a)* automatic, *(b)* advisory and *(c)* semi-advisory. [3220]

Mrs. Ann Taylor: This is not a matter for me but I have asked the Serjeant-at-Arms to write to the hon. Member.

WALES

BSE

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the BSE situation in Monmouthshire. [2528]

Mr. Win Griffiths: The BSE epidemic is in decline in Monmouthshire and throughout Wales. The number of new cases has fallen sharply: separate figures are not available for Monmouthshire, but the number of reported cases in 1996 for Wales was about 50 per cent. below that for 1995.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the Government's plans to compensate beef farmers in Monmouthshire as a result of the BSE crisis. [2527]

Mr. Griffiths: Producers in Monmouthshire and elsewhere have received direct financial aid—amounting to some £250 million for the UK as a whole—since the start of the beef crisis. In addition to this, significant sums are being spent on expanded intervention arrangements, on the calf processing scheme and on the over 30-months scheme.

Health Service

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the role of financial targets in assisting NHS trusts to provide a professional health care service. [2823]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Financial targets are an important element in ensuring that a professional healthcare service is provided most efficiently within the resources available.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the financial position of Welsh *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* trusts at the end of the financial year 1996–97. [2818]

Mr. Griffiths: Until the annual accounts of both health authorities and NHS trusts are received it is not possible to make an accurate assessment of their financial positions.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which of the (i) Welsh health authorities and (ii) Welsh NHS trusts have been reported to him as being likely to be in deficit in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 1997–98; and what are the arrangements for carrying over of deficits. [2819]

Mr. Griffiths: Subject to the final accounts position, health authorities have indicated a financial out-turn as follows:

Health Authority	*Forecast Surplus/(Deficit) 1996–97*
Morgannwg	(1.370)
Dyfed Powys	(7.394)
Gwent	(1.440)
Bro Taf	(8.029)
North Wales	(6.541)

The table summarises the latest returns from health authorities of forecast out-turn based on an income and expenditure basis, which attempts to calculate the total resource costs incurred in any one financial year. The figures are provisional. All authorities succeeded in meeting the requirement to remain within their notified cash limits for the financial year 1996–97. Cash limits reflect the actual liquidity requirements of authorities to meet liabilities as they arise.

The following trusts are reporting a deficit position for 1996–97:

Morriston—this trusts' financial performance was debated by the Welsh Affairs Committee report and a copy of its findings is available in the Library of the House.

Carmarthen—this was a planned deficit and the trust achieved a year on year break-even position.

North Glamorgan—this was due to a technical adjustment in relation to an accounting treatment for early retirements.

Pembrokeshire—this was due to a technical adjustment in relation to an accounting treatment for early retirements.

Morriston NHS Trust is in the process of drawing up a recovery plan to be agreed by commissioners and will be expected to return to a balanced position within agreed timescales. It is too early in the financial year to forecast the likely out-turn for 1997–98.

As health authorities deal with cash figures the carrying over of deficits is not applicable. However, the present arrangement for the carrying over of deficits for trusts is that they are required to devise a recovery plan, in conjunction with their respective commissioners, and would be expected to return to a balanced position within an agreed timescale.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the long-term financial position of Welsh *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* NHS health trusts. [2820]

Mr. Griffiths: The Government is currently reviewing the financial position of the NHS in Wales and we will be in a better position to do so when the audited accounts have been received. We have announced a review of the number and configuration of NHS trusts to identify a more effective way of delivering services and this will realise considerable savings. We are also reviewing the formula for distributing resources to health authorities.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will institute an annual investigation into the effectiveness of financial targets in the NHS as a means of highlighting relevant trends in financial performance. [2821]

Mr. Griffiths: The effectiveness of financial targets and trends in financial performance in the NHS are subject to continuous review.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if the requirement for NHS health trusts in Wales to break even, year on year, allows a trust with a surplus in one year to budget for a deficit in the following year. [2822]

Mr. Griffiths: Yes. However, should a trust forecast a year end deficit, for which they did not have sufficient reserves, it would be necessary to prepare a recovery plan which would be formulated in conjunction with commissioners. The trust would be expected to return to a balanced position within an agreed timescale.

Council Houses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to release the controls on the use of receipts from council house sales; what estimates he has made of the number of extra jobs that will be created as a result; and if he will make a statement. [3148]

Mr. Win Griffiths: We have introduced the Local Government Finance (Supplementary Credit Approvals) Bill. When enacted, this will allow us to release resources in the form of Supplementary credit Approvals. We will consult local authorities in Wales on the timing and phasing of the release, and the targeting of resources before taking final decisions on these issues. Until that stage is reached, I cannot estimate the effect of this new investment on job creation.

Casualty Units

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he plans to take to increase staffing of trust hospital casualty units on Saturday evenings and early Sunday mornings; and if he will make a statement. [3150]

Mr. Win Griffiths: Trusts have been made aware of our requirements to provide high quality services including the need for patients to be assessed within 10 minutes of their arrival at accident and emergency or casualty departments. It is for respective trusts to consider how best to deploy their staffing resources to meet requirement.

Assisted Places Scheme

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list *(a)* the total numbers of (i) pupils and (ii) schools and *(b)* the total amount of public expenditure involved in the assisted places scheme for each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement on the total expected savings from the abolition of the assisted places scheme in Wales. [3172]

Mr. Hain: The position over the last five years is as follows:

Financial year	*Number of pupils*	*Number of schools*	*Total cost £*
1992–93	700	8	2,457,230
1993–94	691	8	2,621,261
1994–95	720	8	2,771,504
1995–96	726	8	2,904,845
1996–97	887	14	3,462,320

Projected expenditure for 1997–98 is £4.5 million, for 1998–99 £5.1 million[1] and 1999–2000 £5.7 million[1]. Subject to Parliamentary approval of the Education (Schools) Bill, total estimated savings once the scheme is phased out will amount to some £5.7 million per annum.

[1] Planned provision for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 will be subject to review in the forthcoming public expenditure survey.

Nursery Education

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many *(a)* three-year-olds and *(b)* four-year-olds, received state-funded nursery provision in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement on the amount of extra expenditure which would be needed to meet total demand for state funded nursery provision for (i) all three-year-olds and (ii) four-year-olds. [3173]

Mr. Hain: The information requested is as follows:

At January	*3-year-olds*[1]	*4-year-olds*[1]
1995–96	18,600	35,251
1994–95	19,375	34,638
1993–94	18,779	34,165
1992–93	18,258	34,822
1991–92	17,942	33,866

[1] Includes full and part time pupils in maintained nursery, primary and special schools.

Specific funding of £42.5 million is being provided in 1997–98 to enable all four-year-olds to receive education of at least five half day sessions per week. We will consult on targets for education for three-year-olds in the context of the forthcoming White Paper on education.

Class Sizes

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the total new expenditure needed to *(a)* reduce all class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds to 30 or under and *(b)* reduce all class sizes for all school children to under 30; and if he will make a statement. [3174]

Mr. Hain: We will consult the Welsh Local Government Association and Local Education Authorities in Wales in the context of the forthcoming White Paper on Education on implementation of our policy of reducing infant class sizes to 30 pupils or less. That consultation will include an assessment of costs which will vary from area to area. Reduction of all classes to under 30 is not under consideration.

SCOTLAND

Carers

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the recommendations in the Carers National Association's report, "Still Battling? The Carers Act One Year On"; and what action he will take to ensure that carers are fully informed of their rights. [2986]

Mr. Galbraith: The report was launched on Monday 9 June as part of the 1997 National Carers Week. We will study the report carefully and consider what action is necessary.

Registers (Access Charges)

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for what reasons the Registers of Scotland have increased the cost of access to *(a)* the sasine search sheets and *(b)* the on-line database for the register of inhibitions. [2571]

Mr. McLeish: The fee contained in the Fees in the Registers of Scotland Order 1995 (S.I. 1995 No. 1945) for the searching of any Register of Sasines search sheet affecting one property is £7. There has been no increase in this fee. Private searchers enjoy special arrangements whereby a "badge" fee enables each searcher to have access to the search sheet between 08.30 and 16.30 each day. This preferential arrangement permits a "badgeholder" to make multiple searches during this time. A daily "badge" fee of £30 was set in 1993 and was based on the £5 fee for a search of any one search sheet contained in the 1991 Fees Order. The 1995 Fees Order increased this £5 fee to £7 and the daily "badge" fee, as part of a catch-up exercise, has been increased, pro rata and with effect from 1 May 1997 from £30 to £42.

The fee contained in the Fees in the Registers of Scotland Order 1995 (S.I. 1995 No. 1945) for searching each group of six names or less in the Register of Inhibitions and Adjudications is £7. Historically, the fee for on-line searching of this computerised Register has borne no relation to the search fee as set up in successive Fees Orders. Over the years there has been a gradual catching-up exercise underway. Prior to 1 May 1997 the fee for searching each group of six names or less was £0.94, an 86 per cent. discount on the fee as set out in the 1995 Fees Order. With effect from 1 May 1997 the discount has been reduced to 50 per cent. The new fee of £3.50 for searching each group of six names or less in now related to the 1995 Fees Order.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Tom King: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what research has been commissioned and what estimates have been made by his Department and what information presented to him, regarding the costs per annum to the total Scottish Office budget of the introduction of a minimum wage at *(a)* £3.50 an hour, *(b)* £4 an hour and *(c)* £4.40 an hour; and if he will make a statement. [2111]

Mr. Wilson: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Board of Trade on Monday 9 June 1997, *Official Report*, column *310*.

Urban Aid Programme

Mr. Gorrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to increase the funds available for the urban aid programme. [2284]

Mr. Chisholm: The Government are committed to remaining within the existing Public Expenditure totals for 1997–98 and 1998–99, and any increase in funds for one programme could therefore be funded only from reductions in another. Over the coming months, Ministerial colleagues and I shall be reviewing all the financial priorities within the Secretary of State's expenditure programmes. Decisions on any transfers of resources will be taken following the review of priorities.

Federation Councils on Alcohol

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has received concerning the future of Argyll and Bute Federation Councils on Alcohol; and if he will make a statement. [2853]

Mr. Galbraith: Representations have been received from the Director of the Federation about the organisation's financial difficulties. However, this is a service issue which requires to be resolved at local level by the statutory and non-statutory agencies in the Argyll and Bute area.

Environment Protection Agency (VAT)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans he has to enable the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to reclaim VAT; and if he will make a statement. [2689]

Mr. Chisholm: VAT refunds are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases of MRSA have been recorded in each health authority district in Scotland in each of the last 12 months. [2980]

Mr. Galbraith *[holding answer 11 June 1997]:* Information on the total number of cases of infection or colonisation with methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is not collected centrally in Scotland.

The Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health receives isolates submitted voluntarily by hospitals in Scotland. The following table shows the numbers of isolates received for the 12 months to May 1997 for each Scottish health board area. Several isolates may be taken from a single patient on one occasion or at different times.

Number of MRSA isolates submitted by Scottish hospitals to the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health, by health board areas, by four-week periods, May 1996 to May 1997

	Weeks													
	1996								1997					
Health board	*21–24*	*25–28*	*29–32*	*33–36*	*37–40*	*41–44*	*45–48*	*49–52/3*	*1–4*	*5–8*	*9–12*	*13–16*	*17–20*	*Total*
Ayrshire and Arran	5	6	6	11	7	8	10	10	12	16	19	15	24	149
Argyll and Clyde	15	21	47	6	29	12	19	24	27	41	28	30	33	332
Borders	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Dumfries and Galloway	1	0	2	6	1	4	4	8	9	26	11	18	13	103
Fife	5	3	1	2	3	2	4	2	1	4	3	2	1	33
Forth Valley	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	55	52	43	43	218
Greater Glasgow	24	29	3	34	23	7	49	27	60	74	64	30	74	498
Grampian	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	8	3	16
Highland	0	2	2	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	3	1	13
Lanarkshire	16	38	25	21	34	26	43	30	28	52	32	56	62	463
Lothian	9	14	6	11	22	21	17	17	18	54	25	47	57	318
Tayside	9	2	5	15	9	7	12	22	19	23	16	28	19	186
Total	85	115	97	109	128	87	161	141	200	346	252	280	330	2,331

Deportation

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many persons awaiting deportation have been detained at *(a)* HM Prison Greenock and *(b)* other prisons in each of the past seven years; what was the average time spent in such detention; and if he will make a statement. [2765]

Mr. McLeish: Detailed statistics concerning persons detained before 1995 are not available within the Scottish Prison Service. The number of persons detained in *(a)* Greenock and *(b)* other prisons in Scotland under the Immigration Act since 1995 are detailed in the table. The average period of time spent in detention by persons awaiting deportation is 54 days.

	1995	*1996*	*1997*
Aberdeen	13	18	6
Barlinnie	—	1	1
Cornton Vale	—	1	3
Edinburgh	10	11	11
Greenock	67	65	54
Inverness	1	—	—
Longriggend	—	—	3
Perth	—	1	—

NORTHERN IRELAND

Health Board Headquarters (Armagh)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the cost of the gardens at the headquarters of the Southern Area Health Board at Tower Hill, Armagh City. [2143]

Mr. Worthington: The total cost of landscaping, including the courtyard gardens, within the Tower Hill site was £28,347.

Acute Hospitals

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the acute hospital rationalisation proposals will be implemented. [1522]

Mr. Worthington *[holding answer 11 June 1997]:* Teams have been set up in the Royal Group of Hospitals Trust and the Belfast City Hospital (BCH) Trust to take forward the decisions arising out of the Acute Hospitals Reorganisation Project. The process of implementation has already begun but in view of the inter-relationship of many of the specialties involved and the complexities arising from this, implementation will be on a gradual basis and is likely to take a couple of years. As promised by the Secretary of State earlier, I am presently looking again at the decision to centralise maternity and associated services in the BCH Tower Block. This is also the subject of a judicial review.

Departmental Running Costs

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if she will make a statement about the 1997–98 running cost limit for the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments. [3771]

Mr. Murphy: The gross running cost limit for 1997–98 for the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments is £783,171,000. There is also a net running cost limit of zero for the Land Registers of Northern Ireland. Details of the provision for individual Northern Ireland Departments are set out in the Northern Ireland Estimates published today and are available in the Library.

Police Authority

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements have been made for the appointment of a new Police Authority for Northern Ireland. [3813]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Police Authority has a vital task to perform in securing the maintenance of an adequate and efficient police force. It also has a very important role to play in enhancing the relationship between the police and the public it serves.

I have therefore appointed 17 members of the Police Authority for Northern Ireland for a term of three years which will begin on 29 June 1997. In making the appointments I have, as required by the Police Act (NI) 1970, consulted organisations and persons representative of the community in Northern Ireland. In addition, and in accordance with the Guidelines issued by Sir Leonard Peach, the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland, applications for appointment were invited by advertisements in the Northern Ireland press. As a result, the Authority widely represents the community and continuity is provided by the continuing service of several individuals for a second term.

TREASURY

Monetary Policy

5. **Mr. Sutcliffe:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that the Government's monetary policy objectives are met. [1589]

Mr. Gordon Brown: Last month I announced reforms which gave the Bank of England operational responsibility for setting interest rates. Today, I have written to the Governor setting out the Bank's remit and how it will be held accountable for meeting its target.

To meet the Government's objectives of high levels of growth and employment, we need consistently low inflation. That is why I am today announcing a precise and rigorous framework to achieve the Government's inflation target of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent.

Our new long term framework will ensure that if inflation is 1 per cent. higher or lower than this target, an open letter will be sent by the Governor to the Chancellor so that the public is fully informed of why the divergence has occurred and what steps will be taken in response.

I have arranged for the letter which I have sent the Governor today to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Cyclical Social Security

19. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the causes of the predicted rise up to 2001–2 in cyclical social security as set out in table 4.6 in the most recent Red Book; what assessment he has made of the implications; and if he will make a statement. [1604]

Mr. Darling: The spending plans inherited by the Government for the period up to 1999–00 assume increases in Cyclical Social Security expenditure from future inflation upratings and future growth in the number of Income Support claimants and the average amounts of benefit paid to them. They are partly offset by an assumption of falling unemployment. Beyond 1999–00 the projections allow for additional growth in expenditure above what would be expected from inflation upratings, in line with that observed in the past. The Government are currently reviewing these plans and will announce the outcome in the Budget.

Unemployment Figures

21. **Mr. Bayley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the methodology used by the Government for calculating the level of unemployment. [1606]

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend's interest in methodology is well placed and shared by the Government and the Government have begun a process of consultation which reflects the Employment Select Committee's recommendations for more prominence to estimates for the labour force survey.

On 8 May the Office for National Statistics launched a process of consultation with users about the dissemination and presentation of labour market statistics. The Director of the Office for National Statistics is responsible for

deciding the form, the coverage and timing of release of statistics by his office, which is committed to a wide-ranging consultation.

The consultation reflects the Employment Select Committee recommendation to give more prominence to estimates from the labour force survey.

The Government are committed to ensuring the widest possible acceptance of these statistics, and the ONS will make public the conclusions of the consultation.

Manufacturing Investment

22. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will next meet representatives of manufacturing industry to discuss ways in which investments in new manufacturing enterprises can be encouraged. [1607]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: Treasury Ministers regularly meet representatives from British industry. We are keen to discuss ways of improving investment in new companies, and industry more generally.

Local Tax Offices

23. **Mr. Key:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the reorganisation of local tax offices by the Board of Inland Revenue. [1608]

Dawn Primarolo: Since 1993 the Inland Revenue has been carrying out a 10 year Programme to reorganise its whole network of local offices. Firm plans exist for the period up to mid 1998 and proposals for the remaining period are currently being considered by the Board of Inland Revenue.

Economic and Monetary Union

24. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place the issue of the single currency and the protocol on the third stage of economic and monetary union on the agenda for renegotiation at the intergovernmental conference at Amsterdam. [1609]

Mr. Darling: Economic and monetary union (EMU) is not on the IGC agenda. I have no intention of reopening the protocol which protects our right to choose whether to join the third stage of EMU.

Bank of England

25. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with what frequency he plans to meet or communicate with his nominated members of the Bank of England's new monetary policy committee. [1610]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I have no plans to meet or communicate with the four new members of the monetary policy committee in their official capacity. The Treasury will be represented at the committee's meetings in a non-voting capacity.

Unemployment

26. **Mr. Paul Clark:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to reduce youth and long-term unemployment. [1611]

Mr. Darling: We will give 250,000 under 25s opportunities for work education and training, and encourage employers to take on those unemployed over two years. Further details will be announced in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget.

39. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about his proposals to reduce youth and long-term unemployment. [1624]

Mr. Darling: We will give young people aged under 25 opportunities to work, using a £60 per week rebate to employers, to enter full-time education and training, and to do work in the voluntary sector or in a new Environmental Task Force. We aim to help 250,000 young people move from welfare to work. We will also help employers to take on those unemployed over two years with a £75 a week subsidy. An advisory task force, chaired by Sir Peter Davis, will advise on key issues of programme design and implementation, and mobilise the support of employers. Further details will be announced in the Chancellor's Budget.

Inflation

27. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the basis on which he will determine his next inflation target. [1612]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to the hon. Members for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) earlier today.

Windfall Tax

28. **Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed windfall tax on prices charged by the utilities to their consumers. [1613]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be considering a wide range of factors in reaching his view on the windfall levy. He will be consulting the regulators and will announce details of the levy in his Budget statement.

34. **Dr. Fox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the representations he has received from the National Association of Pension Funds regarding the windfall tax. [1619]

Mr. Robinson: Treasury Ministers are treating representations from companies and other bodies as confidential.

35. **Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the operation of the windfall profits tax. [1620]

Mr. Robinson: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce details of the windfall levy in his Budget statement.

38. **Mr. Maude:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what measure of profits he will base the windfall tax. [1623]

Mr. Robinson: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will announce details of the windfall levy in his Budget statement.

Private Finance Initiative

29. **Mrs. Osborne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to promote private finance projects. [1614]

Mr. Geoffrey Robinson: I announced an immediate review of the machinery of PFI, by Malcolm Bates, the Chairman of Pearl Group and a former member of the Private Finance Panel. That will streamline and improve the process. I have also scrapped the requirement for universal testing of all projects.

Capital Receipts

30. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact of an increased release of local authority capital receipts on the public sector borrowing requirement. [1615]

Mr. Darling: The release of capital receipts will be phased to meet the requirements of prudent management of the public finances, including having regard to the effect on the PSBR.

Exchange Rate

31. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the change in the value of the pound against the basket of international currencies relative to June 1996. [1616]

Mrs. Liddell: Since June 1996 the pound (on its trade weighted index) has risen by around 16 per cent. The Government want a stable and competitive pound over the medium term, consistent with its objective of price stability.

Public Expenditure

32. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much public expenditure has been increased to date by the policy changes initiated by the present Administration. [1617]

Mr. Darling: There have been no increases to date in the planned level of public expenditure.

VAT (Fuel)

33. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans to reduce VAT on domestic fuel. [1618]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have a manifesto commitment to cut VAT on domestic fuel and power to 5 per cent.

Youth Unemployment

36. **Mr. Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what contribution Her Majesty's Treasury has made since 1 May towards combating youth unemployment. [1621]

Mr. Darling: The Treasury has been closely involved with other Government Departments in drawing up proposals to help 250,000 people aged between 18 and 25 move off benefit and into work. Further details will be set out in the Chancellor's Budget.

Interest Rates

37. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the needs of businesses/exporters in particular are taken into account in the setting of interest rates. [1622]

Mrs. Liddell: In setting interest rates, the monetary policy committee of the Bank of England will be able to draw on the information gained from business surveys, and the Bank's network of regional agents which cover the whole of the United Kingdom. The Bank's agents have widespread contacts with companies, both large and small, and other organisations covering all sectors of the economy.

Customs and Excise (Freemasons)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures are in place to ensure that officials of HM Customs and Excise declare their membership of secret societies, with special reference to the Freemasons. [1910]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Customs and Excise publish internal guidance for all staff on personal conduct. This is based on the Civil Service Management Code, which applies not just to members of Customs but to the whole of the civil service.

The policy in respect of membership of societies (secret or otherwise) is based on the following:

> Civil servants must not misuse their official position to further their private interests or those of others. Conflicts of interest may arise from official dealings with, or decisions in respect of, individuals who share a civil servants private interests (for example, freemasonry, membership of societies, clubs and other organisations, and family). Where a conflict of interest arises, civil servants must declare their interest to senior management so they can determine how best to proceed.

Members of Customs who feel they have been subject to unfair treatment related to membership of an organisation are encouraged to make a complaint using the Department's normal procedures.

Customs and Excise (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what (i) equal opportunities and (ii) fair employment policies are implemented by the Customs and Excise Department in Northern Ireland; and which members of staff are exempt from these policies. [1911]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 6 June 1997]:* Customs and Excise operates an equal opportunities policy for all its staff. The aim of the policy is to provide equality of opportunity for employment and advancement on the Department of the basis of ability, qualifications and aptitude for the work.

In relation to Northern Ireland in particular, the Department is committed to ensuring that the skills and abilities of staff from both the Protestant and Roman

Catholic communities are developed and used to the full. This means that no job applicant or member of staff will receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of their religious belief or political opinion.

No member of staff is exempt from the equal opportunities or fair employment policies.

Financial Services Industry

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his plans for reform of the regulation of the financial services industry. [1584]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 20 May, *Official Report*, columns 507–24.

Single Currency

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research he has commissioned or evaluated on the effect on the world gold price of the sale of excess reserves by states participating in the single currency. [1731]

Mrs. Liddell: Developments in the world gold market are kept under continuous review as part of the normal process of managing the official reserves.

Capital Gains and Inheritance Taxes

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations the Government have received in recent years from the Centre for Policy Studies, the Institute for Economic Affairs, the Adam Smith Institute, the Bow Group and the Institute of Directors about the relationship between capital gains and inheritance tax rates, investment decisions and Exchequer revenues; and if he will make a statement. [2793]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* One representation has been received since 1 May. This was sent by the Institute of Directors and concerned the effect of capital gains tax rates on investment decisions. We will consider carefully this representation, and any others which we receive.

Mr. Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policies on capital gains tax and the encouragement of business investment in *(a)* publicly quoted and *(b)* unquoted companies. [2796]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 June 1997]:* Our manifesto contained a commitment to reviewing the effects of capital gains tax on long-term investment.

Minimum Wage

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the CBI regarding the impact on the economy of a national minimum wage. [1592]

Mrs. Liddell: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has not received any representations from the CBI on this matter. Business leaders will be represented on the Low Pay Commission, which will make recommendations to Government on the appropriate level of the minimum wage, taking into account the wider effects on the economy.

Public Borrowing

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his definition of the Government's golden rule in respect of public borrowing. [2979]

Mr. Darling *[holding answer 10 June 1997]:* Over the economic cycle the Government will borrow only to invest and not to fund current expenditure. Further details will be set out in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget Statement.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to remove the tax relief from private health insurance premiums. [2873]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 June 1997]:* It would not be appropriate to comment on any possible tax changes during the run up to the Budget.

Pension Funds

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much revenue would be raised by restricting the payable tax credits on dividends paid by United Kingdom resident companies to pension funds and other exempt institutions to *(a)* 15 per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent. and *(c)* 0 per cent.; [1853]

(2) at current values of United Kingdom pensions fundholdings, what would be the effect on the value of those funds if payable tax credits on dividends paid by United Kingdom resident companies were reduced to *(a)* 15 per cent., *(b)* 10 per cent. and *(c)* 0 per cent.; and if he will make a statement on the ability of such funds under these circumstances to meet their obligations without receiving any additional contributions. [1854]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 2 June 1997]:* Payments of tax credits issued with dividends of United Kingdom companies to pension funds and other exempt institutions and to individuals were about £5 billion in 1996–97. As the right hon. Member will be aware the consequences of any changes would depend on responses of the companies and institutions involved.

Banking Supervision

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to appoint to the new system of banking supervision only appointees from firms which have not been criticised by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors. [1445]

Mrs. Liddell: Appointments will be made on the basis of the skills, experience and integrity of the individuals concerned.

Mortgage Lenders

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will require mortgage lenders with tied insurance arrangements to display warnings that only one specified company's products are on sale in their branches. [2026]

Mrs. Liddell: No, the Government have no powers to require mortgage lenders to display such information, but welcomes the industry's Mortgage Code which comes into effect next month. Unless where insurance concerned is an investment under the Financial Services Act 1986, where the regulators' existing rules about providing information on whether agents are tied or independent already apply.

Profit-related Pay

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the proposal to end tax relief on profit-related pay, with special reference to the first £1,000 of income. [2865]

Dawn Primarolo: I have noted my hon. Friend's suggestion but it would not be appropriate to comment on any possible tax change during the run up to the Budget.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost of mortgage interest tax relief in Scotland in the years 1995–96 and 1996–97; and what it is estimated to be for 1997–98. [2532]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost of mortgage interest relief in Scotland was estimated to be £200 million in 1995–96.

This estimate has been obtained by applying the regional distribution of the cost of mortgage interest relief from analyses of Family Expenditure Surveys up to 1994, to the total figure for 1995–96. It is not possible to provide reliable estimates for mortgage interest tax relief in Scotland for 1996–97 or 1997–98.

Duty Free Shopping

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the effect on the cross-channel ferry industry of the abolition of duty free. [2660]

Dawn Primarolo: None, but Customs and Excise have received copy reports commissioned by the industry outlining the likely effects of abolition from their perspective.

Tax Returns

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of tax returns were received by the Inland Revenue *(a)* prior to 31 October, *(b)* between 1 November and 31 January, *(c)* between 1 February and 5 April and *(d)* more than 12 months after the date of issue following the end of the tax year resulted in fines and penalties for late submission not involving fraud or wilful neglect in each of the above categories. [2130]

Dawn Primarolo: Few returns submitted within 12 months following the end of the tax year were likely to attract penalties for late submission. Returns submitted later than this were more likely to be subject to penalties.

Illegal Imports

Mrs. Ballard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate she has made of *(a)* the loss of revenue to the Exchequer and *(b)* the loss of income to retailers in the United Kingdom due to the illegal importation of tobacco, wines and spirits. [2543]

Dawn Primarolo: Customs' current estimate of the total revenue evaded (excise duty and VAT) in a year through the smuggling of alcohol and tobacco is set out in the table below. The table also sets out Customs' estimate of the retail value of the smuggled goods at UK off-licence prices, including excise duty and VAT. The amounts actually lost to UK retailers and the Exchequer will be less than the amounts shown below. This is because many smuggled goods, particularly alcoholic products, represent additional consumption rather than substituting for similar goods purchased in the UK.

£ million

Product type	*Revenue evaded*	*Retail value*
Spirits	50	75
Wine	50	100
Beer and cider	110	235
Tobacco products	560	765
Total	770	1,175

The above estimate does not include any amounts for commercial fraud.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people under the age of 25 years are currently on the jobseeker's allowance scheme *(a)* in Winchester and *(b)* in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [1287]

Mrs. Liddell: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

Letter from Tim Holt to Mr. Mark Oaten, dated 12 June 1997:

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has asked me to reply as the Director of the Office for National Statistics to your recent question on how many people under the age of 25 years are currently on the jobseekers allowance scheme (a) in Winchester and (b) in the United Kingdom.

ONS figures cover all unemployment-related benefits i.e. they include those receiving National Insurance Credits only, although these only constitute a small proportion of the total (approximately 10 per cent). JSA specific counts can be provided by Department of Social Security but not to the required geographical breakdown—only for Great Britain.

The ONS produces two measures of unemployment. The first, derived from the quarterly Labour Force Survey, is defined on a consistent and internationally recognised basis set out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and counts as unemployed, people who are: a) without a paid job; b) available to start work within the next two weeks and c) have either looked for work in the past four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained.

ONS also publishes the monthly claimant count, which is based on the UK administrative system and includes all people claiming unemployment-related benefits at Employment Service offices on the day of the monthly count, who on that day had signed on as

unemployed and available to do any suitable work. All people who attend an Employment Service office to sign are counted, irrespective of whether they are actually receiving benefit.

Both measures are described and compared in the ONS booklet *How exactly is Unemployment Measured?*, a copy of which is enclosed. This booklet is also available in the House of Commons Library.

ONS information is only available on the total number of people claiming all unemployment-related benefits (Jobseeker's Allowance or National Insurance Credits). In April 1997 on an unadjusted basis, people age under 25 years and claiming unemployment-related benefits numbered 245 in the Winchester parliamentary constituency and 440,028 in the United Kingdom. If specific JSA breakdowns are required these are available from the Department of Social Security.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc., between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

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Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates, etc.* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Comm = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

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